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Screen

The British Cinema

**Interviews: Alberto Cavalcanti, Gavin Lambert
Straw Dogs and the English Critics: Charles Barr
Notes on British Film Culture: Alan Lovell
TV Documentary: Nicholas Garnham**

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Editorial

Power and Culture

In his notes on British film culture Alan Lovell recommends a programme of intellectual work and the practical need to organise a more viable, more vigorous film education movement. But neither the one nor the other are possible without resources. The centre of resources for film culture in Britain is the British Film Institute and its power and money are backing a very different tendency indeed a system of film culture so structured as to make Alan Lovell's recommendations not radical but idealist. The policy of the Institute, not the rhetoric, but the practice, defines priorities basically hostile both to serious intellectual work on the cinema or to the growth of a film education movement.

One impulse behind this number of *Screen* devoted to the British cinema is distress about that cinema, the recognition of a need to understand it and the inadequacy of an approach which finds its ideas from France, its movies from abroad and particularly from Hollywood and which periodically reviles British productions and British critical ideas.

This number of *Screen* is far from exhaustive or comprehensive but what it contains makes clear that the problems are not simply those of lack of talent, lack of ideas but the institution of certain ideas, certain talents. That behind a particular British film culture whose outlines can be perceived are certain configurations of power and it is that power which must be exposed and altered as much as the ideas which it supports and gives voice to.

The English critical reception of *Straw Dogs*, which Charles Barr details in his article, revealed not only the superficiality and sloppiness of that criticism but the inability of the critics to understand a movie which did not fit their narrow ideology and prejudice (a demand for a surface realism) and indeed one which so challenged their complacency that it was greeted with outrage and hysteria. The critics all saw the same movie, only it was not the one on the screen.

Critic-journalists have an important cultural/economic function. They help to decide which films get exhibited and talked about (and direct the ways in which they are talked about and perceived), and therefore, to an extent influence which films make money. The critics make all the international festivals, help adjudicate the films there, advertise them back home and very much determine the movies which get shown at the British Film Institute's trade jamboree, the London Film Festival, and hence the films which later get exhibited on the art house and film society circuits. Here, once again, the Institute is central in its subsidy to the Film Society

movement and in its chain of regional theatres (showing the 'best' of world cinema).

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But the Institute is involved more than this for the system is most highly articulated and mutually reinforcing. The Institute programmes movies at its national and regional film theatres which however interesting as individual movies or separate programmes are set in a context as superficial and trivialising as Sunday newspaper reviewing. That context is provided in its programme booklets but more important by the house magazines, *Sight and Sound* and *The Monthly Film Bulletin*, magazines of film journalism massively supported by State finance.

Those who write for the national press each week, write for the Institute house magazines each quarter. It is an opportunity for the same old thing, only more. That more is acidly summarised by Gavin Lambert in the interview with him – 'I mean look at *Sight and Sound* now, which is purely verbal; it masturbates with rather second-hand ideas. . . . It's all on the level of verbal double-talk'.

But the critics do more, unfortunately, than talk and write and influence distribution and exhibition patterns and the modes of perception of the cinema. They determine, with Institute backing, the films that are to be preserved by the National Film Archive. The critics not only trivialise the present film culture but debase a future one by determinations they are given by the Institute over the past.

On the one hand there is an official rhetoric, 'let a hundred film cultures bloom', on the other there is a policy which in practice ensures that this will not be the case.

It is not simply ideas which are at stake but power, the power to organise, to disseminate and to control ideas, their content and means of expression. The Film Institute has such power and deploys it in such a way that it can maintain in good conscience the liberal faith 'radical ideas must be given a chance of expression' in the sure knowledge that the dice are loaded against such expression having any major effect. It is a question here of power not words.

The Institute can afford its liberalism because its real power is unchallenged and unquestioned. Indeed it is rather unconscious of that power. Its liberalism is sincere not diabolical. The small magazines infrequently appear, often disappear because of inadequate finance. (The Institute gives *Monogram* a few hundred pounds, somewhat less than the enormous subsidy to its own journal *Sight and Sound* magazine). Distributors not linked to the Institute version of film and film culture exist very tenuously. A similar situation prevails among young film-makers and in the area of film production.

There is no 'alternative' cinema or 'other' voice and certainly the spectre raised by the Institute of radicals and a totalitarian approach, 'a single film culture' is ludicrous in the circumstances.

- 4 The single film culture is the Institute's and that and the power behind it must be challenged.

Alan Lovell correctly makes a call for film education as the area from which an effective challenge might come precisely because education might provide a context for development of serious and informed ideas about film and television. Charles Barr points to a similar need in characterising a split, but an unhealthy one lacking any real tension, between Culture on the one hand and Education on the other.

The brief recent experience of SEFT in attempting to build a film education movement has revealed to SEFT not only the enormous task it is but the amount of finance and political power (both inside and outside education) this requires. The Institute makes this task doubly difficult for in order to begin to talk of film seriously the Institute film culture implicitly must be criticised and opposed. The prejudice within education that film is mere entertainment, not to be studied like other subjects is a view underlined by NFT programme booklets, Sunday paper reviews, *Sight and Sound* and the rationales put forward for film preservation.

A further test, of course, is money. Total Institute expenditure for the year ending 31 March 1971 was £570,000. Education received £32,000. Meanwhile the price of film extracts provided by the Institute and used mostly in schools and colleges goes up. Education must be properly costed.

Mr. Philip Jenkinson having complained of words concerning him on pages 39 to 41 of our Screen Pamphlet One, *Films on TV* by Edward Buscombe, we wish to make it clear that it was not intended in any way to appear detrimental to him and we apologise for anything which he feels gave that impression, without of course making any admissions.

Notes on British Film Culture

Alan Lovell

I

Present British film culture can be divided broadly into a majority and a minority film culture.¹ The centre of the majority film culture is the American and British films shown at the Odeon and ABC/EMI cinemas. The exhibition of these films is sustained by the production and distribution facilities of the major American and British companies – Rank, EMI, MGM, 20th Century Fox, Universal – and by the reviews, stories, gossip and advertising that appear in newspapers and magazines, on television and on the radio.

This culture is in decline and consequently it is very uncertain of itself. The decline is not peculiar to Britain. It is an international trend that has to do in part with the variety of leisure activities now available, at least in industrialised, affluent societies. Television presents the most direct threat. Indeed it might be more accurate to say that the centre of this film culture is now constituted by films on television rather than at the cinema house. The decline has had a sharper impact on British film production because of its particular dependence on America.

The minority film culture centres on French, Italian, Swedish films, the films of Eastern Europe and Asia, exhibited in art cinemas and at film societies. These films are not integrated into the majority culture in the way American films are. Reviews, stories, gossip and advertising relating to these films tend to appear in newspapers and on television infrequently and then only in the 'quality' press or on 'high-brow' art programmes.

The minority film culture has a second centre – a commitment to analysis, scholarship and film theory (film study). This commitment is evident in journals like *Afterimage*, *Monogram*, *Sight and Sound*, *The Silent Cinema*, in varied series of books about the cinema and through courses in adult education institutions, universities, art colleges and further education.

In contrast to the majority film culture, the minority one is growing. In the past decade, the art house/film society area has considerably expanded in part through the establishment of Regional Film Theatres by the British Film Institute. Similarly analysis, scholarship and theory have been extended in an increased number of books now published about the cinema and by the development of courses about the cinema in higher education.

The main purpose of this article is to suggest some perspectives on British film culture for *Screen*. Because it is a journal of film education and because of its commitment to the development of

6 film study, *Screen* is itself part of the minority culture. This article is devoted to a more precise characterisation of that culture in the hope that this will help to define the role of *Screen*. This does not mean that the majority film culture should be regarded as of only secondary interest. On the contrary, one of the major tasks for any journal of film analysis and theory is to develop an understanding of the entire film culture. The need for such an understanding is particularly urgent now when that culture is being radically altered.

Behind the seeming amorphousness of the minority film culture – *Sight and Sound*, The Electric Cinema Club, *Afterimage*, The Academy Cinema, The London Film-makers Co-op, the Film Department at the Slade School of Art, *Cinema Rising*, the National Film Theatre, Connoisseur Films, the New Cinema Club, the Federation of Film Societies, the weekly and Sunday film critics, the Regional Film Theatres – certain relationships can be discerned. The most crucial are those which determine what are exhibited, reviewed and written about. The complex consists of the International Film Festivals, the London Film Festival, *Sight and Sound*, specialised distributors like Contemporary and Connoisseur, exhibitors like the Academy Cinema, the 'quality' critics of *The New Statesman*, *The Observer*, *The Sunday Times*, *The Guardian*, the film societies and the Regional Film Theatres.

The raw material is provided by films shown at Cannes and Venice, a pick of which then appears at the London Film Festival. Distributors select some of these for exhibition in Britain. Choices will be determined in part by past success and reputation (Bergman, Bresson, Bunuel, Truffaut, Jansco) in part by the response to them at the Festivals. These choices are then showcased at the Academy Cinema (or Paris Pullman or Curzon) and then become part of the repertoire of the art houses, Regional Film Theatres and film societies.

Sight and Sound critics and those of the daily and weekly papers are important in this process. They attend the Festivals and the articles they write help decide the films that will be bought for exhibition. When the films are exhibited at, for example, the Academy, their response helps to decide which films will then be more widely shown in the art houses outside London and in the Regional Film Theatres, and which will then find their way into film society programmes.

The present minority culture has been overweighted towards this function rather than towards film study. Film has failed until very recently, and then only in an *ad hoc* way, to establish itself as an object of study in higher education which could provide the necessary facilities for such a study to be seriously pursued. As a result there is no set of institutions that can counterbalance or add to the set organised to exhibit and publicise films.

An equally important reason for the existence of this situation

has been the way *Sight and Sound* has defined itself. As the subsidised magazine of a Government organisation set up 'to encourage the art of the film' it was in an ideal position to be a journal of film analysis, scholarship and theory. Instead it became a magazine of film journalism about the contemporary cinema and involved in the apparatus of exhibition. It is now a crucial part of this apparatus as mediator and propagandist. Each year it provides extensive reviews of the film festivals; its writers double as the newspaper and 'quality' magazine critics. Extended articles solidify (in part establish) the taste tentatively formed in the immediacy of festival going and weekly reviewing.

Sight and Sound's self-definition is not an accident. It emerged from an ideology that had an important influence on the nature of the minority film culture first formulated in *Sequence* in the late 1940's and then carried over into *Sight and Sound* when *Sequence* ceased publication. *Sequence* (which was a positive reaction to the criticism of 'Bloomsbury' writers like Clive Bell, Roger Fry and Virginia Woolf) saw criticism primarily as a matter of personal response, the expression of a cultivated taste. *Sequence* reacted negatively to what it regarded as the cramped academicism of much of the 1930's documentary movement's writing.² A valorising of the personal and the poetic and a suspicion of theory and scholarship led in the case of *Sight and Sound* in the direction of journalism.

The defining characteristic of the minority film culture then is a definite taste for 'foreign' quality films rather than 'popular' circuit films. Given the number and range of films available, these have to be selected on some basis and generally it has been based on major international trends. In the early 1950's Italian 'Neo-Realist' films; since 1960, the French 'New Wave' has predominated. This response has to a certain extent been mediated by ideas and attitudes developed in this country. For example, the response to neo-realism was strong because in the early 1950's the documentary movement's stress on realism was still influential. This stress on realism also meant that Rossellini, who was the first of the neo-realist directors to seemingly move from neo-realist principles, was critically down graded. After *Rome, Open City* and *Paisa* his films became progressively less available in this country. Similarly, the New Wave's attachment to Hollywood was generally ignored or dismissed as an example of French eccentricity. In this manner criticism affected distribution and exhibition. The criticism became self-fulfilling.

What conception of art is currently implicit in the selection of films? What ideas guide the selection of films by Chabrol, Jansco, Makeyev, Bresson, Truffaut, Oshima, Bunuel, Bertolucci, Bergman? Thematically the films must deal with 'serious' issues. This demand is a form of realism. Not realism in its most common form, verisimilitude, the imitation of life, but in the sense of a going

8 behind appearances to discover what life is really like. Common themes are alienation, non-communication, the smugness and conformity of bourgeois life, sexual frustration, liberation. Formal means show a close acquaintanceship with the techniques used by *avant garde* writers and painters: suspicion of 'story' and 'character', disruption of narrative structure, allusion and quotation, the use of pop-art colour schemes, destruction of three dimensional space.

Art is regarded as the free expression of a strong personal vision; it is removed from any social or economic context. The social and economic considerations necessarily involved in the making of films are considered to be limitations. The successful artists are those who free themselves from such limitations.

Art is thought of as separate from and superior to entertainment (mainly the province of Hollywood). Although the dominance of Hollywood by economic considerations means it is viewed with great suspicion, films made there are not completely ignored. Certain Hollywood film-makers who have managed 'to buck' the system are regarded on more or less equal terms with their European or Asian counterparts – Arthur Penn is the most obvious contemporary example. The rest of Hollywood is part of show business. Some of the older directors like Ford or Hawks are seen as having a somewhat ambiguous status. These directors are regarded as being able to do certain things so well that their Westerns or Gangster films almost attain the status of art.

The dominance of this view of art is a mark of the part *Sequence* ideas have had in shaping the minority film culture (and to the continuing influence of 'Bloomsbury' ideas in British culture generally). However the film culture has not been shaped by *Sequence* alone. The 1930's documentary movement, although it lost its coherence and identity in the early post war years, still had an effect. The current film culture is a coalescence of the two.³

The most important effect of the documentary movement has been to deprive the minority film culture of a film-making sector. In the 1930's documentary films were completely part of the general minority culture. They were written about in the critical magazines and shown in the film societies. But the production structure that Grierson created for documentary film-making, with its dependence on the support of the state or large industrial firms and its concentration on propaganda and education inevitably separated it out from the cinema of art and entertainment. By now documentary film production is a distinct area; documentary films having a critical reputation as worthy, but dull and prosaic. No new production structure has been created to replace it. Film-makers who have emerged out of documentary film-making – Lindsay Anderson, Gavin Lambert, Karel Reisz, Tony Richardson – have had to establish themselves in the film-making sector of the majority culture.

The documentary movement has had an influence in another direction. In so far as the minority film culture has had an influence outside of the cinema on general British culture it has been through the acceptance of documentary ideas. Politicians, educationalists, industrialists and moralists all see the film as a powerful instrument for persuading and informing people. The large support the government has given to the development of audio-visual aids within education and the tendency to discuss television in terms of documentary and news programmes as the 'good' sector and drama and entertainment as the 'bad' are both indications of that influence.

Sequence was originally hostile to the aims of the documentary movement:

Jennings' films are all documentaries, all made firmly within the framework of the British Documentary Movement. The fact ought not to strike a chill, for surely the creative interpretation of actuality should suggest an exciting, endlessly intriguing use of the cinema: and yet it must be admitted that the overtones of the term are not immediately attractive' (Lindsay Anderson in an article on Humphrey Jennings, in *Sight and Sound*, April-June 1954).

But faced with the general decline of the cinema and its marginal place in British cultural life the futurist attractions of CCTV, cassettes, concept loops and the general paraphernalia of audio-visual development seem to present exciting possibilities so that at least lip service is paid to them and no serious debate about their use and the assumptions behind it has taken place.

The minority culture is therefore made up out of a coalition between *Sequence* and 30's documentary ideas and by the interconnectedness between film criticism, distribution and exhibition. This interconnectedness is the crucial element in the culture. Critics write about films and encourage distributors to acquire them; when the films are exhibited more or less the same critics approve them so helping to decide both the films that are made widely available in art houses and film societies and the likely response to them. The system is a closed and self-sustaining one.⁴

However before this description of the minority film culture is made complete, another feature of it needs discussing.

II

This description of the minority film culture so far has concentrated on established institutions and their ideas. One of the most noticeable features of the past few years has been the growth of new institutions; exhibition outlets like the New Cinema Club and the Electric Cinema Club; distribution set-ups like The Other Cinema, Politkino and Twenty Four Frames; production groups like Cinema Action and the Tattooists; journals like *Cinema*,

10 *Cinema Rising, Kinema, Monogram and Screen.*

All these groups are part of the minority culture in that they are committed to its central functions, making inaccessible films available and developing ideas about films. They are not, however, closely linked to the established groups and generally express opposition to their ideas. It therefore seems necessary to acknowledge a split within the minority culture as a whole and to characterise it on the basis of an establishment and an opposition. Unlike the establishment, the opposition has not created a set of relationships between its constituent groups which makes it into a coherent force. In so far as there is any coherence in the opposition groups three separate tendencies can be indicated.

1. *Post-Cahiers du Cinema tendency.*

This exists mainly at the level of magazines like *Cinema, Kinema, Monogram*. All of these magazines are in some way descendants of *Movie* (which continues to exist in an attenuated way). They are united by a deep attachment to the commercial cinema, particularly to Hollywood; an interest in the development of French New Wave ideas about film-making of which Godard is the centre; sympathy towards the ideas put forward in *Cahiers* prior to 1968 (*auteur* theory, *mise en scene*) and in the post-May 1968 French/Italian film scene generally (semiology, the role of ideology).

Outside the magazines this tendency has virtually no existence. Logically it would expect to find its film-making sector within the normal commercial set-up, either through the opportunities for minority culture film-making that exist in France and Italy, or through the majority culture's production set-up. But the absence of a film-making sector within the minority film culture and the instability and drabness of the majority production sector does not allow this. For distribution and exhibition it is dependent to some extent on the majority culture, particularly for American films; for distribution, the major American companies; for exhibition, the circuit cinemas for current films, the National Film Theatre, the odd 'flea pit' cinemas and television for older films.

It is one of the peculiarities of the minority film culture that this tendency has not replaced the establishment. Given the impact of the New Wave in the early 1960's, one would at least have expected *Movie* to supplant *Sight and Sound*.⁵ Its failure to do so, and the consequent stagnation of the minority film culture has mainly to do with the support the British Film Institute gives to *Sight and Sound*, with the attendant economic stability of *Sight and Sound* and its prestige as a result of official government support.

2. *Underground Films.*

The underground film tendency in this country seems to have been

a spin off from the American underground film movement of the late 1950's and 60's. The American movement emerged out of an opposition to Hollywood and an attachment to *avant garde* art. The British underground has not significantly changed the American position.

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The underground film tendency is primarily a film-making one, asserting the primacy of the individual artist as against the collective involved in orthodox commercial film-making; opposing the technical polish and high finish of commercial films and valuing formal experiment and the breaking of taboos, especially sexual ones, in the choice of subject matter.

The London Film-makers Co-op which has played a role in production, exhibition and distribution has been the centre for the underground film. The New Cinema Club is its most regular and public exhibition outlet although one or two underground film-makers, particularly Andy Warhol, have had their films shown in cinemas belonging to the establishment.

3. Political Film.

Unlike the others the political film tendency is primarily concerned with the instrumental use of the cinema, seeing it as a means of persuasion and propaganda. Generally it is a part of 'new left' politics. It has manifested itself in a variety of contexts, the best known of which are the Cuban cinema, the Newsreel group in the United States, and the politicisation of the French cinema which occurred as a result of the 1968 events in France.

The British form has reflected all of these variants. Its most noticeable development has been at the level of distribution with the setting up of organisations like the Other Cinema and Politkino. It has had less success at the level of production and exhibition. The exhibition possibilities for political films are so limited that Politkino has been forced to establish its own exhibition outlet.

The political films made in this country have been of the newsreel or documentary kind. There have been no equivalents of Cuban feature films or American experiments like *Ice*, or of Godard's recent work, unless a television play like Ken Loach's *The Big Flame* is included. The distrust of fiction is undoubtedly connected with the hostility to the orthodox commercial feature film which has been primarily identified as a vehicle for bourgeois ideology.

III

What position should a magazine like *Screen*, whose first commitment is to film education, adopt in relation to this existing minority film culture? In the first place it is forced to take a critical position to the establishment, not simply because of that establishment's complacency and lack of intellectual curiosity, but more centrally because of the ambiguity of its attitude towards film education. The establishment does not have a firmly coherent

- 12 position about film education because its two shaping forces (1930's documentary and *Sequence*) have had differing attitudes towards it.

Sequence was basically indifferent to education because of a built-in social elitism. Education was unproblematic, something taken for granted. Because of an uncritical confidence in the abilities that breeding and education gave, no great need was felt to develop particular tools for the understanding of film. Such problems as film presented were thought to be something the properly educated man could take in his stride. So the prejudices of this kind of education, its antipathy to theory and abstraction, its hostility to technology and commerce, are given free play.

Committed to education and propaganda as basic aims of its film-making, the 1930's documentary movement did not have the same hostility to education. It saw the educational system as an important area where its films could be shown. It also saw the value of lecturing and teaching if the movement was to establish itself firmly and if its films were to be understood properly.

But its notion of education was a somewhat limited one. The education process was seen mainly as a matter of inspiring and enthusing. The concept of education as a body of knowledge, with its own disciplines and skills, was quite foreign to it. Grierson's populism and pragmatism led him to dismiss such a concept as irrelevant and elitist. As the vitality of the movement inevitably diminished so did its educational impulse weaken. The invitations to lecture were still accepted but the acceptance was a conditioned reflex, an acknowledgement of a decision made long ago, the reasons for which were half forgotten.

Any challenge that *Screen* could offer to establishment ideas would be made more powerful if the opposition could be made more coherent. *Screen* is in a good position to do this because unlike most of the other journals it has a degree of economic stability, and is the journal of a film education movement. Such a coherence is unlikely to be easily achieved. It will be of little interest if it is simply a coalition on the basis of opposition to the establishment. The need is for a focussing of debate so that disagreements can be properly argued out.

A critical challenge to the establishment, an attempt to make the opposition more coherent, the creation of a basis for film education could be achieved if the minority culture's commitment to the development of analysis, scholarship and theory were re-activated. Such a reactivation could only be made as part of an effort to establish film study as a systematic discipline, a part of serious intellectual enquiry like the disciplines of biology, psychology, linguistics, physics, history.

But the effort cannot be made outside of a context. It needs to be made through a detailed and careful examination of the context; and the formulation of issues whose clarification will

help to change that context. In the case of 'the establishment' the areas that need to be examined are: (1) the separation of aesthetic considerations from economic and technological ones, and the assumption of an inherent opposition between the two; the failure to see aesthetic objects as social products; (2) 'the establishment' view of art as a form of moral philosophy, an exploration of serious themes; its puritanism in regard to entertainment; (3) the reliance on intuitive methods of critical interpretation, the uncritical acceptance of personal taste and emotional response; (4) the lack of historical sense, seeing the cinema's past as either 'one damned thing after another' or as made up of a series of directors existing outside of time. (5) the detachment from its own national cinema which makes it unwilling to try to explore and understand it; (6) the desire to attach the cinema to the *avant garde* in art; (7) the faith in film as a means of communication and the belief in the mystique of audio-visual aids.

In the case of the opposition the areas that need examining are: (1) the view of the commercial cinema as primarily a carrier of bourgeois ideology; puritanism in regard to entertainment; (2) hostility to conventional and stylised art, valuing of formal innovation and taboo subjects; (3) faith in film as a means of communication (particularly in relation to political propaganda); (4) the attachment to theories of art as personal expression (the *auteur* theory, the hostility to the group as against the individual filmmaker); (5) the relationship of television to film.

An intellectual challenge will not be sufficient on its own to change the minority culture as establishment or as opposition. Challenges and initiatives in other areas will also be necessary. Most important so far as *Screen* is concerned will be an effort to establish film study properly within higher education since without the resources such a change will make available, the effort to make film study into a serious intellectual discipline will be that much more difficult. Probably equally important will be the changes that occur within the majority film culture. There are bound to be important ones during the next decade and they will certainly have profound effects on the minority culture.

Notes

1. They might be better described as 'sub-cultures' except that this would suggest that 'culture' is being used in a more precise way than, in fact, it is. However I have used the word 'culture' rather than a more neutral word like 'scene' to suggest an intermingling of ideas and institutions into recognisable formations.
2. The attitude of the documentary movement towards theory and scholarship was itself ambiguous. As part of the *avant garde* within the cinema it was influenced by the general interest in theorising about film. But the dominant pragmatism of the movement made it suspicious of intellectual activity that had no immediate pay-off. As the documentary movement separated itself off from the *avant garde*, this suspicion crystallised into active irritation and dismissal.

John Grierson summed up this attitude when in an article about Eisenstein he wrote:

I've never been fond of intellectual theorising, and we all know how a philosophy can be the product of a necessity. We all know that the real reason why Eisenstein developed his films in movements like a symphony, was that in most Russian cinemas there was only one projector and the reels had to be changed every ten or twelve minutes. We had the same problems ourselves when we had to build up non-theatrical distribution in Britain. We felt that the existence of a single projector justified our approach to the film in terms of a series of 'movements', and later on there were schools of students who wrote in learned journals to say how clever we were. (John Grierson talks about Sergei Eisenstein, *The Listener* April 13, 1972).

Nevertheless an 'academic' wing of the documentary movement did emerge. Its best known manifestations are books like Ernest Lindgren's *Art of the Film*, Paul Rotha and Richard Griffith's, *The Film Till Now* and Raymond Spottiswoode's *A Grammar of the Film*. Created outside of the mainstream of intellectual life and regarded as a secondary activity by most people actively interested in film, the intellectual level of such writing is inevitably low. Theory consisted of the uncritical elaboration of the conventional wisdom, most of which had emerged in the silent film period; history was thought of as a simple narrative of what had happened.

It was the dull musty quality of this writing that *Sequence* reacted negatively to.

3. Like *Sequence*, the documentary movement was an extension of currents within British intellectual culture. John Grierson connected it with 'Clydeside movements, ILPs, the Great Depression, not to mention Lord Keynes, the London School of Economics, Political and Economic Planning (PEP)'. This list in fact points to two different ideologies, an 'outsider's' ideology represented by the Clydesiders and the ILP and 'Insider's' represented by Keynes, LSE and PEP and there is a certain contradiction in being attached to both. But the movement's strongest commitment was undoubtedly to the pragmatism of Keynes, the LSE and PEP. Grierson quite consciously chose to be on the inside where he could act and influence events, even if his actions were severely limited by the 'inside' position. Discussing, for example, the role of Governments as sponsors of films he wrote:

It is important to note, however, that nothing can be expected from Governments beyond what I shall call the degree of general sanction. . . . This, of course, imposes a clear limit on the creative artist working within the public service, for, obviously, the degree of general sanction does not easily allow of forthright discussions as, say, America's record with the Negroes in the South, or Britain's record with the Indians in the East. The creative worker must not, however, simply denounce this limitation and dissociate himself from government service. If he is a practical operator and a practical reformer he will take the situation for what it is and do his utmost within the limitations set, and this is one of the disciplines which the creative artist must learn in this particular period of society.

Although the documentary movement can be placed with the 'social reform' tradition, it is curiously at odds with it on a crucial point, its empiricism. The 'reality' that the documentary

movement set out to capture in its films was self-evident, it did not need to be patiently discovered through the detailed observation, and statistical techniques of the social reformers. It consisted of the growth of technology and its rational application. The documentarists had a mythical belief in this as representing the main current of history 'Reality' was quite unproblematical for them.

4. It is worth noting the role the British Film Institute plays in this system. It enters it in criticism through *Sight and Sound*, in distribution and exhibition through the London Film Festival, the Regional Film Theatres, and the Federation of Film Societies. The economic support it gives the system in this way helps maintain its stability. The Institute seems quite unconscious of it in this respect.
5. *Sight and Sound* has made some concessions to *Movie*, most obviously through a discussion of Hollywood directors that *Movie* valued. To a certain extent *Sight and Sound* has adopted *Movie's* general perspective on the cinema – the cinema is made up of *auteurs*, Hollywood directors having their own distinctive themes and styles just as much as European and Asian directors do.

Two Titles on Film Education

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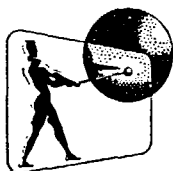
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As Magee enjoys his revenge, Beethoven blares out to swamp Alex's mind, and Kubrick's camera pulls back along a billiards table to reveal a whole contemplative, mellow scene of torture, one concludes, happily, that Kubrick justly deserves his reputation as the cinema's greatest perfectionist (Philip Strick).

This concluding sentence in Philip Strick's review of *A Clockwork Orange* (*Sight and Sound*, Winter 1971/72) is illustrated by a still which, by what seemed at the time an unlucky irony, is wrongly printed, reversed left-to-right. The next issue not only has no correcting note, but offers three more reversed stills from the same film: these illustrate an interview with Kubrick, by Strick and Penelope Houston, which dwells on his 'precision'. It would be petty to make too much, in themselves, of mistakes which may in part be the fault of a subordinate (though Miss Houston does edit the magazine), but this comical lack of precision in *Sight and Sound's* celebration of the film is not unsymptomatic. The critical consensus on the film, which these two pieces reflect, seems to me as essentially careless, as unrigorous, as this.

The most vocal champion of Kubrick and his film, Alexander Walker (critic of the *Evening Standard*, author of *Stanley Kubrick Directs*) also led the attack on Sam Peckinpah's *Straw Dogs* as 'vicious and degrading'. 'The film in no way shows a selective eye and mind at work': the contrast with the perfectionism, and responsibility, of Kubrick was made explicit by several reviewers when, six weeks after *Straw Dogs* first screening, *A Clockwork Orange* was shown in London. *Sight and Sound* saw Kubrick's film as the innocent victim of a public concern with sex and violence on the screen which Peckinpah's film had clumsily aroused. The two films have been almost universally linked in editorials and contrasted by reviewers. In my experience, anyone who likes one of them hates the other. Most critics liked *A Clockwork Orange*. Thirteen of them wrote to *The Times* in December condemning *Straw Dogs* as 'dubious in its intention, excessive in its effect'.

The links are not fortuitous: the films are perfectly suited to the 'compare and contrast' treatment, though I have not seen anyone develop the comparison except loosely and in terms of the sex-and-violence factor. Both are adaptations from novels of the 1960s whose compactness allows the narrative line to be closely followed. One writer (Anthony Burgess) publicly applauds the film version, the other (Gordon Williams) disowns it. A central scene in each is the eruption by a gang into the country home

18 (*Home* is the actual name of the house in *A Clockwork Orange*) in which a liberal academic lives with his wife and work. The extreme violence of the attack draws out a response from him, changing his life. The wife is raped. In *A Clockwork Orange* the main violence happens early in the film and we experience it from the thugs' viewpoint: in *Straw Dogs* it happens late and we are with the academic. In the one, the assault is 'motiveless malignancy', in the other the situation is elaborately built up. One film is icily detached in style, the other nervous, visceral; one, shot predominantly with wide-angle, the other with telephoto lenses.

It is not usually very interesting to analyse the opinions of English film critics, but occasionally, as by this pair of films, they are stung into revealing certain shared beliefs and criteria with unaccustomed clarity. I believe that *Screen*, which performs a valuable service in reprinting texts on film from the past, and translating foreign ones, should be concerned also with these key English texts of the present, and with their implications.

And it does, I think, make sense to group the critics together to a degree that it probably wouldn't even in New York: we have no really distinctive voices like Pauline Kael and Andrew Sarris. Raymond Durgnat, the nearest to them, lacks a comparable platform and makes no regular impact. There are perhaps ten main national outlets (it depends on the definition) for 'serious' weekly criticism: four daily papers, three Sundays, three weekly magazines. Almost all these film critics, including deputies, are oriented towards the British Film Institute, and I don't mean the Education Department. Several write for *Sight and Sound*, others are or have been associated with the Institute in various ways. One response to this might be: the Institute, and the magazine, are admirably broad-minded, drawing on all the prominent critical talent. It is plainly not as straightforward as this. There is a certain sameness about the people who have jobs as critics in the first place, perhaps because those who appoint them are likely to hold a vaguely Institute-derived conception of film culture. It is surely extraordinary how little radical influence all the alternative voices in film criticism of the past decade (since, say, the first publication of *Movie*) have had either on *Sight and Sound* or on regular film reviewing: between these on the one hand, and on the other the Education Department, *Screen*, and the occasional magazines (*Movie*, *Monogram*), there seems now to be an accepted divide, in much more than personnel, with no kind of 'creative tension' across it: it amounts, in large part, to an unnatural split between Culture and Education. The weekly critics are part of a recognisably homogeneous BFI/*Sight and Sound* 'film culture' which is obviously not a sinister isolated phenomenon but an integral part of the British cultural scene. Differences in individual taste are subsumed in a broad similarity of attitudes, values and even tone of voice, as in the bland house-style of *Sight and Sound* so dismally

illustrated at the head of this article.

It would be naïve to hint at any conspiracy to impose a view; none is needed. Philip French (*New Statesman* 3.12.71) reports the instinctive solidarity shown at the press show of *Straw Dogs*: 'Rarely have I experienced such a palpable sense of shock and disgust sweep through an audience'. This sense is still vividly felt in the reviews. To give some statistical background to the comparison I am illustrating, take the figures from the chart on the back of the *Monthly Film Bulletin* (January 1972). Out of eight critics voting, five gave *Straw Dogs* the lowest rating, to 'express antipathy'. Two gave it one star, and Tom Milne gave it three (he was standing in, on behalf of *The Times*, for John Russell Taylor; Taylor later signed the letter to his own paper condemning the film, so his inclusion would clearly have brought the average further down). The average rating for *A Clockwork Orange*, the following month, was three stars.

What, then, was actually written? It is, I think, worth discussing the reviews in some detail, at the risk of seeming to labour certain points.

John Coleman (*New Statesman*) found *Straw Dogs* to be:

two hours of gratuitous violence, sexual and otherwise . . . I lost count of the mutilations and deaths as Dustin Hoffman withstands the siege, suddenly Little Big Man beside his quivery wife. I also lost my temper.

An understandable reason for doing so, given the strength of the superstition that with a film like this the counting, logging, of violent incident is important. It is surprising how many critics, for all the sophistication of their wordplay, drop easily into the simplistic approach of the standard Sunday paper investigation of sex and violence in the media – on the one hand a pedantic cataloguing of perversion and violence, and on the other a wildly impressionistic, generalised account of the 'feel' of the action. Coleman doesn't even try to be precise about the structure of the film – to call a film with such variations of tempo 'two hours of' anything, is odd – and is no more careful in his evocation of what is actually on the screen at the end. Tony Palmer (*Spectator*) uses the catalogue device to lead in to his display of shock and disgust:

It is a tale of bestiality, murder, rape, arson, buggery, lechery, incest and idiocy. It is also unbelievable in that it portrays a Cornish village full of Somerset farmers, North Country vicars and American professors all of whom engage in a mad punch-up late at night in the fog (for reasons unknown or trivial) with a savagery not surpassed since Sam Peckinpah's last film. It's not so much the absurdity of the entire situation and the amount of money which must have been lavished on the creation of that absurdity that I find curious; it's more the apparent

20 worship of useless and gratuitous violence as something to be enjoyed, to be relished, to be esteemed even, that is worrying. . . .

To anyone who has seen the film, the inaccuracy is comic (how many of the village's several North Country vicars come to the farm to engage in a 'punch-up'?), but then the review is meant to discourage people from seeing it. Palmer signed the letter which complained, among other things, about the display of tendentiously selected quotations to advertise the film; one wonders in what way he considers his own methods to be more honest. Then there is his quite unfocussed account of the violence, as with Coleman, Alexander Walker, Dilys Powell it is impossible to disentangle the description from the emotion. One of the great ironies of this whole episode, in fact, is that so many critics, in rejecting the 'instinctive' film (while they praise the cool, cerebral one) do so in such a violent, instinctive way: passion swamps reason, and they succumb to that loss of control which they diagnose in Peckinpah, victims of a process which is a leading subject of the film.

One can, however, here and elsewhere, distinguish three main points of offence:

1. The film contains a great deal of perversion and horror.
2. In the way it shows these things it 'goes too far'. 'The film does not know where to stop' (Derek Malcolm, speaking for many); the violence is all 'gratuitous' (Coleman, Palmer), 'mindlessly revolting' (Miss Powell).
3. The situation is 'unbelievable' (Palmer) from the start; 'exquisitely ludicrous' (Coleman), 'ridiculous' (Patrick Gibbs). Dilys Powell finds the very fact of the marriage between David and Amy 'demented' and is driven to the stalest of 'literal-minded' ploys:

But perhaps some kind of warning is intended: perhaps the film is an object lesson for innocent American mathematicians contemplating residence in Cornwall.

Peckinpah and Hoffman are American so what are they doing in England?

Peckinpah's acquaintance with English life, let alone rural and regional life, is unsurpassedly faint (Gavin Millar, *The Listener*) A first view of the remote Cornish village showing children gallivanting round the churchyard inspires no confidence in the reality, nor does a subsequent view of locals assembled in the pub, the company looking and behaving like cowboys in a saloon. (Patrick Gibbs, *Daily Telegraph*).

The short answer to this sort of criticism is that 1. much of it is not accurate and 2. it wouldn't matter if it were. Take Tony Palmer's quibble about Somerset farmers in Cornwall. The accents may be closer to Somerset, I don't know, and doubt whether

Peckinpah does. It is interesting that nowhere in the film is the fictional village identified as a Cornish one – it is enough for it to be loosely recognisable as ‘West Country’. The vicar (Colin Welland) has a line about having been ‘drafted’ to the village. But how much would it harm the film if the discrepancies which Palmer picks up, looking more closely at synopsis and cast list than at the screen, were genuine? Surely very little. The same principle lies behind these tiny points and the more comprehensive objections to the film’s plausibility. The blunt terms in which Patrick Gibbs appeals to ‘reality’, as though looking for documentary truth about a particular part of England, are significant. When one finds suspension of disbelief in a film immediate and easy it is difficult to engage with those who don’t, and such disagreement, here, could lead into a sterile debate about conflicting experience of rural England; what the pubs are like, how many children play in graveyards, the statistics for violent death. But it is a matter, at root, of attitudes to cinematic convention. It is a fair generalisation that the preference for a certain kind of realistic surface, for an ‘everyday’ verisimilitude, has been a recurrent factor in English film criticism and has inhibited response to a wide range of films with an allegorical or poetic dimension. At least, such films are required to announce themselves clearly, so that they can be given a non-realistic label like Black Comedy, Fantasy, Thriller. A film should either be realistic or (perfect example: *A Clockwork Orange*) create ‘a world of its own’. Films which always tend to suffer critically are those which fall between categories, which are modern and deal with ‘real’ people but whose surface and spread of characters depart, by compression, heightening, etc, from everyday ‘realistic’ expectations. One victim of this was *The Chase*, whose dismissive reviews now look truly incredible in their literal-minded pettiness: the comparison with *Straw Dogs* will be one to return to in a later context.

This question of critical ideas about realism is clearly a key one, touched on at several points in the last *Screen* and worth exploring further. It could, however, be tendentious to smother the particular case of *Straw Dogs* in these generalisations. Thus, Gavin Millar would have the right to accept their validity in principle but still find *Straw Dogs* absurd. We are then thrown back on diametrically opposed responses. For me, Peckinpah at once imposes his fictional setting with complete authority, putting us straight into a complex scene of meetings, tensions, disjointed conversation, and disarming the parochial critic in two ways (ie these are two rationalisations of my response):

1. The lenses of long focal length which Peckinpah mainly uses help to impose a feeling of the scene’s ‘reality’ at another level from the conventional realism debate. We get the sense that the scene is there, going on already, and that we overlook and overhear it: this obtains both in time (the way the scene has already got its

22 impetus when we join it) and in space (the effect of the lenses). It is not that we are *intellectually conscious* that such shots, with their flattened perspective, are taken from a distance, and thus do not break up the scene's spatial autonomy (whereas for an extreme wide-angle shot, as in so many sections of *A Clockwork Orange*, the camera is right under the characters' noses, thus is physically dominating, creating the scene) – if we were so conscious of it at the time, the effect would be offset – but there is a corresponding subconscious effect created physically.

The 'eavesdropping' effect of the telephoto lens, used as it is here, is now part of the basic language of the camera. We are distant-yet-close, as when watching an outside broadcast on television: the distance respects the scene's autonomy, the closeness involves us in it, and this involvement is enhanced by the nervous way the camera has to respond, at this distance/focal length, to the characters' movements. In contrast, with an extreme wide-angle lens we are close-yet-distant, perspectives exaggerated, creating an effect (again, as in many scenes of *A Clockwork Orange*) of peering in through the glass of a goldfish bowl: we may be only an inch away, but the world inside is remote from us, alien.

This is a long digression, but the stylistic distinction is crucial to the way *Straw Dogs* and *A Clockwork Orange* operate. Again one must acknowledge that the *principle* is not all: the choice of a lens in itself achieves nothing, and the telephoto lens is often used in ways more self-consciously mannered than anything in *A Clockwork Orange*. But it seems to me that the spectator has to be unusually determined, or the absurdity of the action extreme, for the skill and nervous intensity of Peckinpah's introduction not to catch him up in it. It is apparent (if one can legitimately argue from audience response) that English people in general do not find the film's premises absurd, and do get caught up.

2. The second way in which Peckinpah disarms criticism of the film's basic premises is by making such a consistent (though unforced) point of the American's strangeness here: not only his remarks about his research work but his appearance, manner and pronunciation (cigarette, garage). We can hardly ridicule his presence as incongruous when it is shown in such detail as being just this. He is quickly established as a complacent but awkward intruder into a close community. The vividness of this opposition and the way it is developed transcends (for me) without question any doubts about the *accuracy* of Peckinpah's West Country. . . . I hope that by now more than enough has been said on this tedious, but critically nagging, point. Only the matter of the 'Western' associations demands some comment. Gavin Millar's treatment of them is particularly curious. A long deadpan opening relating the story in 'Western' terms, with eventually one single word of judgment: 'absurd'. Peckinpah has spent his career making Westerns, and perhaps doesn't know any better. 'It is

difficult to know whether the Western parallels are accidental or not'. They are hardly likely to be, since the original novel by Gordon Williams makes so much of them. Its hero is an expert on obscure cowboy pictures, and at the climax keeps picturing himself as a settler in hostile country. (While several critics, including Millar, refer to the novel with deference, only one, Tom Milne, gives the remotest evidence of having read it). Peckinpah has cut out the explicit reminders while allowing – it would be hard not to – the implicit associations to remain. Their existence here is due more to the universality of the Western myths (an isolated community in a precarious state of order automatically evokes 'the West'), and to the fact of an American's presence, than to directorial pretension. But they extend the resonances of the film's climatic movement in ways that should become apparent, as do the echoes of horror film conventions. The point at this stage is how stultifying it is to use as condemnation in such an unargued, essentially *a priori* way, the fact that one may think of the Western in watching *Straw Dogs*.

Reviewers of the film divide on the whole into two, equally condemning, groups: those who find the situation absurd, and therefore the violence gratuitous and revolting, and those who find the situation real and involving, and therefore the violence, if anything, *more* revolting. David Robinson (*Financial Times*) belongs to the second group. It is in a way a relief, after the things I have so far quoted, to find a critic both cool and analytical in his setting out of a case against the film. He thus isolates some issues which other reviewers might, one feels, have articulated if they had got that far. It is certainly consistent with what many of them wrote. After an account of the climax:

There have probably been equally bloody things in Hammer horror, where the pitch of fantasy reduced the effect to *grand guignol* thrills. Extreme violence could be positively justifiable in a film which employed it as a means to induce revulsion against violence.

Here, however, the violence is presented as entirely laudable and justifiable in its own terms. In the words of the advertising of the film, 'the knock at the door meant the birth of a man and the death of seven others'. The film's unequivocal message is that only by conquering his natural passive and pacifist instincts and partaking in this brutal slaughter does the hero regain his self-respect and the respect of his wife.

There are five or six linked points here, all of them crucial ones of interpretation or principle. A strong feeling is put over of the the film's *impurity*: the director involved with the excesses he shows, involved with the excesses of the film's advertising.

I shall argue that this attack is for the most part unjust, and that, to the extent that the film is 'impure', it is a mark not of

24 its irresponsibility, but of its great strength.

Peckinpah can hardly be held responsible for the advertising. Unlike Kubrick the perfectionist, he does not keep control over this process. In any case the facts of the slogan are wrong: it is odd that, in all the indignation about the film's publicity, no critic mentioned this. Including the magistrate, five men die, not seven — one could bring it up to six only by assuming Tom Hedden's death from his wounds. How many of these does David kill? In the course of an extremely shaky synopsis, the *Monthly Film Bulletin* says he 'kills all five' of his attackers, and one would get this impression from most reviews. In fact, he kills two. When it has so many different forms and sources it makes little sense to consider it all together as 'the violence' (Robinson, above): does he really mean that the attack on the house is 'presented as entirely laudable and justifiable'? Based on such muddled evidence, the final interpretation is likely to be wild. The 'birth of a man' phrase in the advertising is a gift to the hostile reviewer but I do not see how it can be taken as anything but a gross oversimplification of the complex emotional effects of the ending.

Robinson's final sentence is a serious distortion both in its facts and its implications. The film does not contain the 'unequivocal message' he describes. Nor is the 'pacifist' alternative as clear-cut and honourable as he implies that it is.

This is clearly the most crucial part of the whole debate. Indeed, we are dealing with one of the most powerful and disturbing sequences ever filmed, one which is not just 'controversial' in the issues it raises but extremely important. People respond to it intensely; critics and moralisers say that this response is wrong or dangerous. If they are right, either films like this will have a poisonous influence, or censorship will increase (several local councils have already overridden the BBFC in banning *Straw Dogs*). Either alternative is of particular concern to those who work in education. I believe that the moral effect of *Straw Dogs* is a salutary one; or at least that it is so wherever hysteria about the film abates and allows it to be experienced directly, rather than through the haze of wild condemnation or (its inevitable corollary) guilty excitement.

The film's unequivocal message is that only by conquering his natural passive and pacifist instincts and partaking in this brutal slaughter does the hero regain his self-respect and the respect of his wife.

Among the questions to ask here are: 1. Do the characters show this approval of violence? 2. If so, is the spectator encouraged to feel the same approval? 3. How deplorable in fact is the hero's violence? Robinson's answers are respectively Yes, Yes, Completely. He and others take this as being so obvious that they don't need to argue the case. Yet it is a matter requiring careful attention and

judgment. My own answer to all three would be: In part. This sounds feeble, but does not represent fence-sitting by me or by the film. Peckinpah is holding powerful forces in balance.

Robinson does not think the issues through. Let us be clear what David's alternatives are, in the situation as presented at this stage of the film, when the magistrate has been shot and the men break in in earnest. He can stick to his 'natural passive and pacifist instincts' and offer no resistance to the invaders of his house – obeying the wishes of his wife. In other words he can hand Henry Niles over to a drunken and violent mob, to be manhandled and, quite possibly, killed. Or he can resist. Now it would be nice if this resistance meant just having to endure some insults and a little stone-throwing, as he at first hopes ('All right, you've had your fun'), but the challenge becomes overwhelmingly direct and violent. One would like to ask David Robinson and George Melly, both of whom suggest that, *within the film's situation*, a 'pacifist' response would be the only honourable one for David and for Peckinpah (no distinction), at what stage they think David should have opened the door and pushed Henry out. Three 'natural instincts' weigh against his doing so: protection for someone he knows to be at least morally innocent (he has seen Henry being led on by Janice); respect for the rule of law; defence against trespass and assault. It is when natural instincts or principles, valid in themselves, come into irresolvable conflict, that a situation can be called tragic, and this is surely, if we look at the film, how Peckinpah presents it.

Once he starts to respond in kind to violence, David does so singlemindedly. He certainly appears to feel relish in the horrible scene where he beats Cawsey to death with a poker. And after Charley Venner's even more horrible death, he rests and smiles to himself: 'Jesus, I did for them all' (or words to that effect – they are hard to make out).

Freeze this moment, and assume that David equals Peckinpah, and part of Robinson's case is valid; but how can one do either? His brittle moment of self-respect is instantly and pointedly undercut by a new, murderous assault from Riddaway, whom he has assumed to be dead. It takes Amy to save him. So do they now look into each other's eyes, feeling fulfilled? Curiously, in the novel the wife does grow excited by the hero's display of 'virility'; not the least of the film's improvements on it is the way this rather maudlin element has been excised. I can see no evidence for saying David by violence, regains Amy's respect. Nothing passes between them. So far from drawing closer together, they have drifted increasingly apart, like the couple in Bergman's *Shame*. In the last section of the film we see her tentative transfer of allegiance from David to Charley Venner: she tries to open the door for him, calls for him from upstairs when Scutt attacks her. This is a complex, bitter development which would repay ~~Muller~~ examination. It is

26 certainly not reversed when Charley dies. David exults on his own, not with Amy, nor do they communicate when she has shot Rid-daway. The final view of them is of two people on, or over, the edge of insanity, an impression definitely caught in Amy's subjective view looking down at Cawsey's body. The body shares the frame with a played-out record noiselessly revolving on the turntable.

David drives off with Henry, through the fog. 'I don't know my way home'. 'That's okay, I don't either'. He is enclosed with an idiot, driving in the opposite direction from Amy, the home he has defended now meaning little. It is part of a whole series of dislocations. David doesn't know about the rape/seduction of his wife, Janice has not been found, we don't know what happened to Tom Hedden, the phone lines are cut, the record-player revolving . . . everything contributes to undercut the simple fulfilment Robinson and Melly find in the ending, let alone the mindless violence-worship which is all that Palmer, Walker and others claim to be able to see.

Why does the violence in films like this not only shock critics deeply but knock their critical faculties so far off balance? *Straw Dogs* is only one of a line of more or less distinguished films whose violent or gruesome elements have produced an overall critical response which can be termed hysterical: it involves a turning away from the film, a refusal to engage seriously with it and with one's reactions to it. (A scarcely preferable corollary is the trivialising celebration of such a film's purely formal qualities). *Eyes without a Face*, *Peeping Tom*, *Psycho*, *The Chase* and *Witchfinder General* are five which come immediately to mind, all half-accepted in retrospect as 'classics' now that their immediate impact has safely receded. The last two are the closest in structure and spirit to *Straw Dogs*. While there are many differences, the three films have in common the fact that the violence which they analyse is not kept comfortably remote. We feel the intense provocation the hero is subjected to, and feel a release when he responds in kind. As Sheriff Calder beats with his fists the killer of Bubber Reeves, as Ian Ogilvy cuts up Vincent Price with an axe, as David clubs Cawsey to death with his poker, one cannot – I cannot – avoid to some degree sharing their exultation. Everything in the director's staging contributes to our physical involvement. He is clearly 'behind' the violence emotionally, and encourages us to be. Yet to call this 'glorification of violence' would be perverse: not only is it given a precise context – it is not 'violence', but 'this violence' – but there is an inseparable 'backlash' of shock which we share with the characters, and which we could not feel so strongly if we were not so caught up in their actions.

What the critics seem to fear is *contamination*. The director is involved: if we respond, we become involved too. Violence is a vampire bite. George Melly on *Straw Dogs*:

Of course, it's a fantasy, but the thing about it is that it's undistanced. The sexual assault, for instance, is filmed with considerable skill. It excites and disgusts, or at any rate excited and disgusted me. . . .

Thus we feel the same *kind* of intense dual response which is so important in *Amy*, and even in *Charley Venner*. Melly is not praising the film. Both here and in the later scenes he is offended by this degree of closeness to the characters' experience. Writing a few weeks later on *A Clockwork Orange*:

Much of the violence in recent films is unacceptable because it is too lovingly presented. One feels the director in there hacking and gouging. Kubrick gives the feeling of a scientist observing the behaviour of demented laboratory rats. It's the significance of what he shows us which is his concern, and rightly so.

This is a strange piece of writing. The comment on Kubrick is not being offered as a limiting judgment. The last two sentences are hard to reconcile with one another. 'It's the significance of what he shows us which is his concern' – If the formula has any meaning in the context of this comparison, it implies the neutral, 'transparent' style of presentation of for instance the best film of Otto Preminger. Yet nothing could be more different. To observe and present people as 'demented laboratory rats' is to take a strongly un-neutral viewpoint, and every facet of Kubrick's style reinforces this. Aesthetic and moral confusion seems to be to underly the critical reception of *A Clockwork Orange*, as of *Straw Dogs*.²

There is no doubt that it is Peckinpah whom Melly is using for a comparison, in the lines quoted. It is significant first that he can think the viewpoint he attributes to Kubrick so morally superior to Peckinpah's (crudely caricatured as it here is) as to need no argument, and secondly that his terms are so polarised: he allows for nothing in between. The cold gaze is simply 'right'. The censor seems to be in sympathy.

In his judgment the use of music, stylisation and other skills of the director succeed in distancing audiences from the violence, which includes a gang fight, several scenes of beating up, and murder and rape, and keeping the effect within tolerable limits. (*Evening Standard* report)

In view of this, one can only be thankful that the censor was flexible (inconsistent?) enough to pass as much of *Straw Dogs* as he did. That magic device, 'distancing', keeping the effects within 'tolerable' limits. We do not feel pain, aggression or lust watching the events of *A Clockwork Orange*, nor can one imagine Kubrick having done so in setting them up: there is no sign, here, the menace of 'contamination'. The action takes place in an environment which in decor, language and the way it is shot

28 is kept comfortably 'other'. For most critics these factors had a liberating effect. They are free to sit back and enjoy the aesthetic kicks of sex and violence presented balletically. The principles invoked with such a show of responsibility against *Straw Dogs* cease to apply: no need is felt to log the horrific incidents or to protest at their 'gratuitous' quality. I do not think this adjective is a critically useful term – it begs too many questions, tending to assume a facile identity between characters and director – but it is surely a mere descriptive truth to apply it to the violence in *A Clockwork Orange* and not to that in *Straw Dogs*, where it is a consistently motivated violence, given both a pretext and a psychological root. The final irony is that the same critics who were so sternly against violence in reviewing *Straw Dogs* are now found not only enjoying it (in its safely 'distanced' form) but intellectually endorsing it. The message that it is better to give free rein to Alex's brand of ultra-violence than to condition him against it is after all explicit both in the ending of book and film and in the comments of their authors. I do not wish to debate the validity of this idea, as developed in Anthony Burgess's skilful and serious book, but to observe how remarkable it is that so many reviewers, having taken their stand on *Straw Dogs*, should so unquestionably accept it, especially when embodied in another popular film where the dangers, whatever they are, of condoning violence are plainly more vivid.³

One answer no doubt would be the familiar one: there can be no danger, since the film's effects are 'distanced'. But this distance does not make the film morally neutral. Melly compares Kubrick to a scientist observing the behaviour of demented laboratory rats. Another comparison which kept suggesting itself to me was the activities of the Masters John Institute in California, which studies human sexual response under laboratory conditions. There is a way in which this clinical objectivity is more obscene than anything involving passion could be. It is also questionable how far it is possible to understand such fundamental human impulses as passion and violence without gaining insight into them from the inside. This is an argument for the 'impure' approach of Peckinpah. To experience them in the 'uncontaminated' manner of Kubrick's film is to miss a dimension. In contrast to George Melly, I find the violence in *A Clockwork Orange* less 'acceptable' – more immoral, than almost anything I have seen precisely because it is so distanced from what one knows it actually to be like, from its emotional and physical feel.

The doctor, in book and film, tells Alex that:

Violence is a very horrible thing. That's what you're learning now. Your body's learning it.

Two ironies: 1. A distinction is made between intellectual and physical learning. One can't grasp the essence of what violence is

except through the body, or at least the nervous system: the principle is almost a platitude. This is the means by which *Straw Dogs*, like *The Chase*, like *Witchfinder General*, operates; but not the film of *A Clockwork Orange*. 2. The lines represent a programme of social conditioning which will be rejected.

By putting these two together, by its immediacy, *Straw Dogs* conveys the horrors of violence with great vividness, in line with the doctor's formula. Equally, this is not *all* that the film's violence does – hence all the stern disapproval. Look behind the careless caricature by so many of the reviewers and you find this point of principle:

Extreme violence could be positively justifiable in a film which employed it to induce revulsion against violence. (David Robinson, in the review discussed above).

Straw Dogs does this, but admittedly not in such a neat, exclusive way. Robinson seems to want exactly the kind of anti-violence conditioning which Burgess satirises through what happens to Alex. So in effect do all those other critics whose response to the complex, felt, 'impure' violence of *Straw Dogs* is of hysterical revulsion. But to inculcate, in a *pure* form, the message 'violence is horrible' involves (in *A Clockwork Orange*) not just showing the outrages on film but the full aversion-therapy treatment, with clamps on the eyeballs, drugs, etc. The lesson is that solution cannot be so simple. I believe that the disturbing, arousing, perhaps cathartic (a word I have deliberately not been using) violence in *Straw Dogs* represents the best form of mediation between ordinary people and the horrific possibilities of life, avoiding the three main undesirables of incitement, unacceptable conditioning, impotent moralising.

What makes it a salutary film is that it encourages us – helps us, if we are open to it – to face, think through, feel through, the implications of the existence of human aggression. When one says that we must 'come to terms with violence' the reaction is likely to be rapid rejection. However, we have to do so. One cannot just wish away violence and aggression. They cannot be suddenly bred out of humanity. I do not belittle pacifism, but the shallow gestures towards this ideal contained in the response to *Straw Dogs* are intellectually and morally contemptible. To say 'violence is abhorrent' is easy, and may be reassuring to the speaker, like saying war is madness or apartheid is wicked. These are on the level of the legend placed, with some point, on the wall of David's study; it reads 'War is not Healthy for Children and Other Living Things'. It is another matter to start doing anything about these large issues that can have any influence for good. One necessary stage is to understand, by some form of empathy, the impulses which drive people into apartheid, war, violence, and all the other kinds of self-assertion.

David in the first section of *Straw Dogs* is easy to identify with. He is gentle, liberal, clever, modern, vulnerable, putting together, neatly, the good things of civilisation. A nice home, wife, place to work. The advantages of unspoiled country (he mentions the clean air and water) combined with the comforts of progress, epitomised in the sports car with radio. He complacently exploits his inheritance, employing villagers, making a study out of what seems to have been a primary schoolroom, having a quaint mantrap brought home to be an ornament over the fire. He is a man of the future, battenning on the past. And an integral part of this is that he is 'against violence'. One of the first things we see him do is turn his back on it in the pub. Violence belongs to the past and to other places; life is not like Westerns. In fact his attitude is like that of most of us, not least film critics. The action of the film constitutes a nightmarish testing of him and of this attitude: not of pacifism per se, but of a pseudo-pacifism based on lack of self-knowledge within a fortunately sheltered life. He is blind to the fact of violence (and one increasingly needs a less narrow word than this) in others, and to the latent violence in himself, inadequately absorbed in the tensions of all his little games. The fact that chess has a prominent place among these games makes an apt cross-reference, underlining the limitations, when one enters this sort of territory, of the most famous chessplayer among film-makers, the film-maker as chess-player, Stanley Kubrick.

This article needs to be left open-ended. While I certainly hope to have established the poverty of what has been written in this country about these two important films, I cannot say with authority how they in fact tend to work on individuals or on society. It at least seems clear that the last people who should be consulted about the tendency of controversial films in this area are the 'academy' of regular film critics. We need to ask searching questions about the effect of such films, questions related very specifically to them and thus attempt to avoid the dead-ends of the standard type of media/violence inquiry. If we don't do this, all the superficial questions and answers will possess the field, and may well, in the current climate of thinking, have considerable influence. See for instance the *Sunday Mirror* series of April 1972, welcomed by the Home Secretary, in particular the issue of April 23rd. Alex Comfort, asking some radical questions about pornographic literature in a *New Society* article the same week (April 27th) ended: 'Is there a psychoanalytically literate ethologist in the house?' We might ask 'Is there a cinematically literate psychologist who can take the issues on from here?'

Notes

1. It is said on good authority that *Witchfinder General* was voted down by the selection committee for the National Film Archive, while at about the same time they listed Cyril Frankel's *The Witches* as worth trying to obtain for its illustration of the later work of

Joan Fontaine. This committee is heavily weighted with weekly film reviewers, which provides another reason for seeing their tastes as something more important than an ephemeral annoyance.

A particularly revealing document on Michael Reeves's film is a column in *The Listener* (23.5.68) by Alan Bennett. On the basis of the 'he shows, therefore he approves' fallacy, among others, he works up considerable moral indignation, duly endorsed the following week by Eric Rhode.

2. Certain films bring out the 'quality' reviewers in the sort of praise which makes them sound like a chorus of motoring correspondents reporting on a new model. There is the same failure to see the object in any perspective beyond that of a glossy artefact, the same sheer sycophancy of tone. It is the modishly "cool" film which gets this treatment most readily: *Accident, Sunday Bloody Sunday, A Clockwork Orange*. These samples need no comment:

In case we might have forgotten, Kubrick reminds us of the skill with which he can structure a simple conversation scene in a simple domestic setting, extract perfect timing from his actors, select lighting and lenses with invincible authority, and edit his material ruthlessly into an unflagging pace. (Philip Strick, *Sight and Sound*).

Not a single point is missed or miscalculated. Kubrick's mise-en-scene seems now quite effortlessly immaculate. The sets are right to the last detail of nasty interior decor or external decay. Each camera movement and cut is exact and correct: even the speeded-up motion for Alex's orgy, the retarded motion when he pushes his recalcitrant droogs into the canal, and the hand-held cameras for the fight scenes, are absorbed into the rhythms of the whole. (David Robinson, *Financial Times*).

The whole thing works with, yes, the absolute precision of clockwork. Kubrick brooks no argument with his method, indeed he seems almost not to conceive that argument is possible, and because of that, it isn't (John Russell Taylor, *The Times*).

3. Jan Dawson (who I don't think has written on *Straw Dogs*) sets out the logic of Kubrick's film with rare clarity in her enthusiastic *Monthly Film Bulletin* review:

If we are shocked by Alex's violation of bourgeois property (women included) it is only on an intellectual level, since Kubrick carefully distances his effects, postponing our physical discomfort for the moment when the 'therapists' screw their clamps on to Alex's eyes; by the time Alex regains consciousness in his hospital bed, Kubrick has us rooting for him to resume his thuggery – the only way left to us or him of saying 'no' to this dehumanised society.

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Introduction

These interviews with Alberto Cavalcanti and Gavin Lambert are part of a general effort on *Screen's* part to establish some kind of general perspective on the British Cinema. We decided to begin this effort by interviewing Cavalcanti and Lambert because of an important parallel in their careers. Both of them had been at the centre of the British film scene but detached themselves from it.

In Cavalcanti's case the detachment was at both ends of his career. Although he was born in Brazil he started to make films in France in the 1920's. With films like *Rien que les heures* (1926) and *En rade* (1927) he established himself as one of the leading experimental film-makers of that period (he is usually characterised as a leading *avant-garde* film-maker but as he makes clear in the interview he dislikes the term *avant-garde* and does not think it very meaningful). Finding himself constricted by the development and use of sound he came to Britain and involved himself with the Documentary movement, first as a kind of tutor and film-maker and then as producer for the GPO film unit. In 1940 he left the GPO to work at Ealing studios as a director and producer. Then in 1949 he left Britain in a fairly definitive way. Between 1949-55 he worked in his native Brazil. Since 1955 he has worked in Europe and made films in Austria, East Germany, France and Israel. He also made another film in Britain, *The Monster of Highgate Pond* (1960).

Gavin Lambert was born and educated in Britain. He was an editor of *Sequence* in the late 1940's and then became the editor of *Sight and Sound*. In 1956 he left Britain to work in Hollywood. Since then he has lived in America and has pursued a dual career as a script writer and novelist.

These interviews are not conceived in the usual biographical form. In them we have tried to pursue certain general questions about the British cinema in the hope that Cavalcanti and Lambert's experience of it and detachment from it would illuminate or provide leads for understanding it.

In Cavalcanti's case we had three main questions in mind. First we wanted to find out about the tension hinted at in Grierson's essays (Edited by Forsyth Hardy, *Grierson on Documentary*, Faber, 1946) and other writings about the period, between those people whose main concern was aesthetics and those whose main concern was with the propaganda and education. We were particularly concerned to discover how far these tensions were conscious and articulated. Cavalcanti's views seemed likely to be of particular interest because of his experimental work in the 1920's, because he had first worked in the documentary movement as an adviser

34 on the aesthetics of sound and because throughout his career he moved from documentary to feature film-making and back again.

The interview makes clear that tensions did exist. Cavalcanti says his own preferences were for maverick figures like Humphrey Jennings, Len Lye and, interestingly (because his involvement with documentary film-making is rarely mentioned), Robert Hamer. All of these are film-makers whose interest in aesthetic questions is obvious from their films.

However Cavalcanti was very unwilling to describe his preferences in terms of artistic differences. He was particularly insistent that such differences as he had with Grierson were over very minor matters. This was surprising since other 1930's documentarists have said that there were genuine divisions in the movement. Basil Wright has, for example, described the division in terms of the differences between two of his own films, *Song of Ceylon* (1934/35) and *Children at School* (1937). It seems reasonable to suggest that Cavalcanti's own personal generosity and sense of the debt he owed to the documentary movement for rescuing him at a low point in his career made him uneasy about discussing such differences as there were. This feeling was no doubt accentuated by the fact that the interview took place very shortly after John Grierson's death.

Our second main question was about the nature of Realism as a concept. Cavalcanti gave no sense that he thought it a concept that needed explaining or elaborating upon. For him its meaning was self-evident and taken for granted. The general concept that concerned him most was that of the 'cinematic', the need to create a form of expression specific to the cinema. Realism was simply seen as an essential element of the 'cinematic'.

The third question was about the restrictions imposed on film-makers working for the state during the 1930's. Cavalcanti acknowledges some restrictions but thought they were not important. Like other documentarists of the time he felt that there were no serious contradictions between their generally left wing views and the demands by the state as their sponsor. Our attempt to suggest that it was ironic that the documentarists were making films that generally celebrated the industrial system at a time of mass unemployment and widespread poverty produced no response from him. This didn't seem to be because he wasn't sensitive to the social and political issues involved – in another context he was hostile to what he considered was Glauber Rocha's evasion of the social problems in Brazil. Clearly the political stance of the documentary movement will bear some further investigation.

In Gavin Lambert's case we wanted to concentrate on his reasons for leaving Britain, to find out if they marked any kind of break with the ideas which he helped to develop in *Sequence* and *Sight and Sound*, and which are still influential at the present time.

The timing of Lambert's departure from Britain and the film-

maker he went to work with in Hollywood (Nicholas Ray) made his decision to leave of particular interest if placed in the context of the relationship between British and French attitudes to the cinema in the 1950's. As Lambert points out there were important points of contact between the younger generation film-makers and critics in both countries. Both had catholic tastes in films, both attacked the inert, prestige productions of the established film-makers, both called for a more personal intimate cinema. But from about 1956 the viewpoints of the groups diverged. The British film-makers and critics became less catholic in their tastes, reverting to the more traditional British stress on realism as *the* cinematic virtue. The opposition between art and business which had been implicit previously now became explicit and simplified.

Hollywood played a key part in this change. For the British critics Hollywood film-makers dropped out of favour and the Hollywood systems came to represent all that is worst in the cinema. If the attitudes to any one film-maker could be said to sum up the divergence, Nicholas Ray would be that film-maker. In France Ray's work in the late 1950's continued to be valued. In Britain he was dismissed as a casualty of the Hollywood system.

Insofar as Lambert made a choice for Hollywood and Nicholas Ray he seemed to be opting for France as against Britain. However the interview makes it clear that Lambert's decision can't be neatly fitted into the pattern in this way. Lambert still holds to the basic ideas developed in *Sequence/Sight and Sound*; antitheoretical, stressing the personal in both criticism and film-making, suspicious of the business set-up. And the move to America seems to have allowed him to retain *Sequence's* central strength, a catholic interest in the cinema and enthusiasm for it.

Lambert's interview, by eloquently restating the problem of the British cinema, how to come to terms with a drabness, a constriction, a poverty, an absence, that we continuously experience but cannot understand – is an ironic reminder to *Screen* of the difficulty of the task it has set itself.

Alberto Cavalcanti was interviewed by Jim Hillier, Alan Lovell and Sam Rohdie in London in March 1972. Additional material comes from an interview with Cavalcanti by Kevin Glover in London in June 1971. Gavin Lambert was interviewed by Jim Kitses in Los Angeles in March 1972.

ALAN LOVELL

Cinema-Verite in America

Stephen Mamber*

Part 1

At its very simplest, cinema-verite can be described as a method of filming employing hand-held cameras and live, synchronous sound. This is a base description, however, for cinema-verite should imply a way of looking at the world as much as a means of recording. *Cinema-verite* techniques are not the exclusive property of the non-fiction film, and have come to mean anything from a purposely shaky camera technique (as in the shots of the recluse Kane in the newsreel of *Citizen Kane* (1940)¹ to any attempt (however brief or half-hearted) at documentary verisimilitude in fiction films. Clearly, so all-embracing a term signifies very little.

Cinema-verite is a pretentious label that few film-makers and even fewer critics have much use for. In America, and to some extent in France, the term 'direct cinema' is preferred, although that too with some reservations. 'Direct cinema' has been so rapidly assimilated into critical parlance as a description of a technique which is seen to be evident in such disparate film-makers as Bertolucci, Jancso, Warhol, and Rivette,² that I prefer the French designation if only for its now traditional association with the non-fiction film. (Any use of the term 'direct cinema' in this study should be considered synonymous with this more limited application.) Cinema-verite shall be taken to mean that philosophy which has evolved around the term (as well as the techniques employed to express it), and is certainly not to be translated literally.

The essential element in cinema-verite (even above the technical requirements) is the use of real people in undirected situations. By 'real' I mean not only the avoidance of professional actors (unless, of course, we see them as actors) but even to the extent that non-actors are not placed into roles selected by the film-makers. This stricture may seem excessively limited, as it excludes many standard practices such as recreating events with the actual people who lived them, bringing people together for the purpose of filming, or even interviewing anyone (since that, in effect, is directing their behaviour). In fact, it even rules out the film-maker for whose work the term cinema-verite first gained popular currency in the early Sixties, Jean Rouch. So we use 'cinema-verite' under specially qualified circumstances, more in the context of what the American goals have come to be, and as I envision it, as a certain ideal for this kind of filming.

* Copyright Stephen Mamber, 1971

Another term requiring definition is 'undirected situations', which means that any kind of prepared script (however skimpy), verbal suggestions, or gestures, is out of bounds. More subtly, perhaps, the film-maker should in no way indicate that any action is to be preferred over any other. The film-maker is to act as an observer, a gatherer of evidence, and ought not attempt to alter the situations he witnesses any more than he does simply by being there (along with, usually, another person recording sound). A concomitant requirement to the minimum interference dictum is that no special equipment be employed (in the form of lights, tripods, cables, or anything else that cannot be carried by the film-maker as he shoots).

Editing of footage shot this way should attempt to recreate events as the film-maker witnessed them. Since editing is, of course, a selective process, this does not mean that no attempt is made at shaping the material. Rather, it is the idea that the finished film will not contradict the events themselves through a false sequence of shots, juxtaposition of events that may lead to incorrect impressions, or any other manipulative device. The dull argument (too often heard, as it is the result of a snap conclusion without further thought) that cinema-verite is impossible because editing prevents a film from being the whole truth, misconceives cinema-verite in general and the role of editing in particular. No one is arguing that the cinema-verite film does not bear the selective influence of a film-maker. Instead, events themselves should shape the final film. Even though it is reality filtered through one sensibility, the film-maker is not forcing his material into a pre-conceived mould.

In line with this, some of the standard devices of fiction film and traditional documentaries fall by the wayside, especially music and narration. The former is never added (one of the few generalities about these films that almost always applies), and the latter, if necessary at all, should do no more than provide facts essential to following events on the screen. Whatever the film-maker's initial interest in the subject, the final film does not try to make the material seem as if it was observed for the purpose of proving a specific point. The lack of 'attitude' music and guiding narration are part of a general outlook which does not try to push the viewer in one direction and one direction only. Room is left for possibilities of complex response of as much depth as the situation itself.

Another natural but less insistent outcome of a cinema-verite approach is that it integrates the film-making process: selecting a subject, filming it, and editing the raw footage become continuous steps in a single effort and not discreetly assignable tasks. The most crucial bridge is between filming and editing, where there is a need to judge the footage as much by what is missing of the actual event as by what is present, in order to be true to what the film-maker witnessed. When editing is seen as a separate function,

left to people who did not participate in the filming, a whole new set of priorities and biases, based solely on the footage, can conflict with the obligation not to distort the event itself.

When editing is the responsibility of the one who did the filming, there is also a better chance that the editing will not be overly assertive, that the material will not be shaped any more than it must. A goal, I think, ought to be to refrain from overly conscious shaping of the material, to not depend on editing to give force to the film. The raw material should not be too exactly pared down, lest its final polish suggest a too deliberate use of the selective power of editing. Room should be left for situations that are meaningful in their own right, not solely as little pebbles that only take on meaning when the whole mosaic is developed.

Not only should the consecutive steps in the film-making process be under identical control, but also, ideally at least, this should be exerted by a single person rather than by any sort of joint collaboration. This corresponds to the journalistic notion of 'eye-witness report', instead of an assemblage of several reports given relative weights according to external priorities applied after the event by some means of compromise. In films shot by several crews, there is also a very real possibility of different camera styles clashing when edited together. So, this limitation is a recognition of the greater likelihood for success when one is aware of both the interpretive role of filming (which appears as a kind of 'camera style') and the intricate pitfalls of the editing process.

Cinema-verite as we are speaking of it, then, is an attempt to strip away the accumulated conventions of traditional cinema in the hope of rediscovering a reality that eludes other forms of film-making and reporting. Cinema-verite is a strict discipline only because it is in many ways so simple, so 'direct'. The film-maker attempts to eliminate as far as possible the barriers between the subject and the audience. These barriers are technical (studio sets, tripod-mounted equipment, special lights, costumes, and make-up), procedural (scripting, acting, directing), and structural (standard editing devices, traditional forms of melodrama, suspense, etc). While cinema-verite in the literal sense may not be the result, it is a practical working method based upon a faith in unmanipulated reality that is the special distinction of these films. Any kind of cinema is a process of selection, but there is (or should be) all the difference in the world between the cinema-verite aesthetic and the methods of fictional and traditional documentary film. It is a question of freedom, of refusing to tamper with life as it presents itself.

Unfortunately, some writers have claimed that cinema-verite practically makes other film methods obsolete.³ We should view such claims in a dialectical spirit, for while this kind of filming questions many assumptions of fiction films (as well as providing that way of film-making with new devices to exploit), it will cer-

82 tainly never displace fiction film any more than photography has destroyed painting. Still, cinema-verite is more than a mutant offspring of documentary techniques. It deserves a place of its own as an alternative kind of cinema – not documentary (as usually practised) and not fiction either (though often telling a story). Because it is relatively new (primarily due to the recent development of the necessary equipment) is no reason to assume that it is the wave of the future that will drown all past efforts. Nevertheless, it is more than a trickle that will soon die out. Cinema-verite, in short, must be reckoned with as an extension of the present limits of cinema.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Mr Mamber goes on to discuss ideas and approaches which anticipated cinema-verite methods, in the work of Lumiere, Vertov, Flaherty, Zavattini, Roquier, Engel, Ianelli, Renoir and Kracauer. Mr Mamber is concerned in that discussion 'to allay the suggestion, prevalent in studies of this nature, that the methods (of cinema-verite) popped up spontaneously and were without precedent'. What Mr Mamber does is to establish a kind of theoretical base for cinema-verite without however suggesting any simple notion of direct influence. The question of influence he points out 'would require a much lengthier analysis including among other topics, influences of written journalism, photo-journalism, and television, as well as a clearer picture of the traditional forms of documentary (including types popular on television), in order to understand how cinema-verite has developed'.

Tracing the roots and precedents of cinema-verite is a particularly arduous and hazardous task. The primary pitfall is the tendency to equate cinema-verite with some form of super-realism, and then to scan all cinema history (and other arts and means of reporting as well) with an eye on every attempt at non-fictional truth. While there is a good deal that can be learned from that broad approach, it does not, I believe, shed much light on cinema-verite itself. In such an examination, we find several important film-makers or movements seemingly headed in the same direction, but as often as not, they part company in certain crucial areas.

The two men primarily responsible for developing and putting into practice the methods of cinema-verite in America are Robert Drew and Richard Leacock. In the period of their association, from the mid-fifties to 1963 (especially during the last four years), they created what is still the most substantial body of work employing these techniques. Their films remain both pioneering landmarks and a standard for all future work in this area.

Made for television, their films get some attention everywhere and intense analysis nowhere. Some film critics do not even feel that their work is worth consideration as cinema. Andrew Sarris writing in 1966, well after these films had been discussed in such journals as *Film Quarterly*, *Movie*, and *Cahiers du Cinéma*, dismissed all the films in short order:

The cinema verite work of Ricky Leacock . . . belong[s] more to television than to cinema, and live television, not taped or filmed television. The process of editing imposes a moral responsibility on the director to search for a personal truth beyond the factual reality of the footage. As Agnes Varda recently observed, 'there is no such thing as objective cinema (Andrew Sarris)'⁴

In other words, because these film-makers tried, according to Sarris, *only* to record factual reality, in so doing they denied themselves the right to call their work cinema.

We shall examine the films of Drew and Leacock (and those who worked with them) in order to understand the nature of their commitment to reality, to consider their goals, and to determine the processes involved in their quest to capture their reality on film.

Primary

Primary (1960), now ten years old, is a landmark that is still genuinely appealing. Nearly everyone involved with the film does feel that it marked the real breakthrough. Drew, Leacock, Pennebaker, and Albert Maysles all recognise it as the turning point, and generally by reason of the equipment. Leacock, for instance, has said of the film: 'For the first time we were able to walk in and out of buildings, up and down stairs, film in taxi cabs, all over the place and get synchronous sound'.⁵ Drew makes a point of the equipment as well: '*Primary* was the first place where I was able to get the new camera equipment, the new editing equipment, and the new ideas all working at the same time'.⁶ There is much more to *Primary* than equipment improvement, however, and actually I don't feel that the improvement is felt so much here as in one soon after, *The Children Were Watching*. *Primary*, though, remains a fine example of their work, still as exciting to watch now as it must have been when first shown.

Primary is an hour film (the same length as nearly all the films, the fifty-five or so minutes of a TV 'hour' remaining after allowances for commercial breaks) on the Kennedy-Humphrey battle in the Wisconsin Democratic Primary election in 1960. The film is about evenly divided between episodes with each of the candidates (cutting back and forth between them, rather than splitting the show into separate full segments on each). We see them giving speeches, hustling on the street for votes, speaking on television, and waiting in their rooms on election night for the results. Kennedy wins, but not decisively, and they now must push on to West Virginia to start the struggle all over.

Drew originally had the idea for *Primary*, and with Leacock sought out Senator Kennedy to persuade him to yield to this new technique of being followed everywhere in the course of the cam-

84 paign. (It is interesting that Drew and Leacock felt the necessity for being able to shoot in private situations as well as public ones, for some of the most effective scenes in the film are views of the thoroughly fatigued candidates when they are out of the public eye.) Kennedy relented and Humphrey later agreed, so the film was set. Drew arrived in Wisconsin two days in advance and hastily made up a working plan, deciding which team would go where and how long filming would last. It was only at the last moment that the camera crews came in.⁷ As we shall see, this minimal preparation was typical, and quite unlike the planning behind most documentary films.

Leacock, Pennebaker, Al Maysles, and Terence Macartney-Filgate all did a good deal of shooting. Macartney-Filgate is an important name in cinema-verite, a major figure in the National Film Board of Canada, especially for the *Candid Eye* series in the late Fifties. Macartney-Filgate worked on this film and *X-Pilot*, but he took a dim view of the New York school of direct cinema, feeling that they were doing things then (around 1960) that the National Film Board had done several years previous.⁸ Drew, Leacock, and Maysles all acknowledge that he shot a good deal of *Primary*, although his name is often overlooked in references to the film.

For the breakthrough in cinema-verite, it is surprising what a small portion of *Primary* is shot with synchronised sound. Leacock has said that he was the only one to make extensive use of synch sound equipment, that Pennebaker and Maysles were shooting with silent Arriflexes.⁹ At this time, it was still necessary for him to use a wire connecting the recorder to the camera (though the cameras were much lighter than when he faced this same restriction while filming Bernstein in Israel, several years earlier). However, his ingenuity was abundant, and the technical bravura of his work is certainly a major reason for *Primary*'s success.

The two most intimate glimpses of the candidates were accomplished under particularly difficult circumstances. In both cases, Leacock shot synch sound entirely on his own, with no sound man or other technical assistance. The first comes early in the film, a scene shot within Humphrey's car as he travels from one small town to another. He talks a bit about the countryside and then leans back to catch a few minutes sleep, as the windshield wipers tap out a monotonous rhythm on a rainy day. George Bluestone stated his case strongly, but in the proper spirit, when he wrote, 'That one sequence gives us more insight into the bone-crushing fatigue of a primary campaign than a thousand narrative assertions'.¹⁰

Leacock was sitting in the back during this journey, a microphone attached to the seat and shooting done with a small amateur 16mm camera. Leacock believes Humphrey didn't even know who he was that day, probably thinking he was just a friend of some-

one in his entourage. He was equally inconspicuous in filming Kennedy in his hotel room on the evening of the election. Since the Senator was sitting in the same place the whole time (clearly exhausted by the campaigning experience), Leacock hid a microphone in an ashtray (remembering to change reels on the portable tape recorder at the required intervals) and had another attached to his camera to catch other voices in the room.¹¹ Then, to quote Leacock, 'I retired into the corner and got lost, sitting in a big comfortable armchair with the camera on my lap. I'm quite sure he hadn't the foggiest notion I was shooting..¹²

There is much more to this scene than mere technical trickery. It demonstrates the special brilliance of a first-rate cameraman like Leacock (or as Al Maysles was later to achieve), the ability to transcend passive observation through a series of selections within single shots, but without losing the sense of actuality. Leacock pans quickly, from Jackie Kennedy whispering hello to a friend over to the Senator talking on the phone, Kennedy later dragging himself out of his seat to shake hands, and all the time we have a full sense of the room and the activities of the many people in it. The sound quality is poor; there is hardly any light; there are many quick pans and zooms, but it is still an outstanding revelation. Leacock is more than modest to say that he just sat there with 'the camera on my lap'. We shall often be noting his special talents, but this scene still stands among the best.

There is one shot in *Primary* that no writer fails to mention, a long tracking shot behind Kennedy. The shot begins outside a door to a building, where a small crowd is waiting. Jackie walks by and into the door, and then the Senator comes into the frame and heads for the door. We (the camera) stay right behind him as he walks down a long corridor, shaking hands quickly as he moves through the mass of people. We go into a door, up a small set of stairs, and onto a stage, the shot ending with a view of the loudly applauding crowd. It is exuberant and exciting showoff, that wide-angle lens sticking to Kennedy through thick and thin. (There is, though, a cut about one minute into the four minute scene that makes the sequence slightly less spectacular than it might have been.)

The shot's punch is also partially deadened by the use of a portion of it earlier in the film (an editing gaffe which occurred again in *The Chair*, when a similar long tracking shot down a hall to the electric chair is used twice). It is also part of a mixed view of what the film should be, either a re-creation of the feeling of what it's like to be a primary candidate (the same way you'd recreate a jet pilot's experience by aiming a camera out a cockpit window) or a study of two personalities locked in conflict. There is a confusion of purpose in *Primary*, coupled to an energetic sense of trying to do everything and be everywhere at once.

Albert Maysles, who executed this famous shot, is also respon-

86 sible for a particular device shortly after of a type that soon became outmoded in direct cinema, a cutaway close-up of a small action. The shot in question is a close-up of Jackie Kennedy's fidgeting hands as she says a few words to the audience. The problem with the shot is that this detail doesn't first become noticeable within a larger context; it needs to be zoomed in on instead of cut to. The distinction may sound trivial, but it is visually clear. Subjective details are fine, but we need to share in a sense of their discovery. Maysles understands this, and said recently that if he were to be shooting this now, he would try to integrate it into a lengthier shot to make the gesture more meaningful.¹³ This is an editing as well as a shooting problem, for the way the shot appears in the film, it could actually have been photographed days apart from the rest of the scene and simply inserted for dramatic effect. It is cases like this shot and the need generally for the filmmaker to understand the power of the tools at his disposal that make direct cinema a more delicate exercise than it might seem.

Besides the standout scenes, *Primary* is divided between fine moments, full of insight and some crude, ineffective ones. This wouldn't be worth noting, except that the good footage is all in synch and most of the rest was not shot with live sound. In the latter category I would place several long handshaking scenes, a clumsy montage of feet in voting booths, and a lengthy speech by Humphrey shown primarily in long-shot and in the faces of the audience so as to hide the obvious lack of synch sound. In the former group is an excellent scene of Kennedy posing for a studio photo (which cuts to a shot of the Humphrey photo on the front of his bus), Humphrey being interviewed on a local radio station, and good scenes with both candidates talking to people on the street. The contrasts between the two kinds of shooting suggest once more the absolute superiority of synch sound, for non-synch material becomes agonisingly artificial when placed in juxtaposition.

Seeing that much of the technical difficulties which hampered their earlier work is still present here, one has to conclude that the real breakthrough was a creative one: they began to comprehend the special strengths of their methods of filming. They realised the value of little moments that do not necessarily advance a story, and at the same time, they saw the potential drama in a situation they did not create. If our final judgment of *Primary* is favourable, it must be for the energy behind it, the unpretentiousness of its fresh approach, and the suggestion of later possibilities for these techniques. *Primary* humanises an impersonal process. It shows us a side of elections we rarely see, as opposed to giving us a 'more truthful' view. As Leacock admits, '*Primary* was a breakthrough, but in no way, manner, or form did *Primary* achieve what we set out to do, which was to show what really goes on in an election.'¹⁴ Regardless of the initial intentions, *Primary* fills in some gaps

which aren't (and couldn't be) filled by more traditional documentary forms or in journalistic reporting.

On that last point, there has been a good deal of argument as to the relative merits of *Primary* and T. H. White's book *The Making of the President 1960*. (Incidentally, White is clearly visible but never identified in the scene in Kennedy's room on election night, stalking about with a small pad in his hand.) The general opinion was that perhaps *Primary* was superior as a vehicle to show the noise and fatigue of campaigning (like the Humphrey scene that Bluestone thought was better than anything that could be written), but that on the whole the White book fills in more details and tells things the camera couldn't reveal that people should know. A not overly extreme case was advanced by one French critic, who took *Primary* to task for not pointing out the intricacies of Wisconsin voter registration (which permitted Republicans to cross over in primaries to vote for Democratic candidates), as White's book had done.¹⁵ (This is alluded to in the film, though, when Kennedy refers to the Nixon people who may have voted for Humphrey to hurt JFK's chances. This aside might not have been translated in the French subtitles.) Jean-Luc Godard, in a stinging rebuke of Leacock in particular and direct cinema in general, also denigrated *Primary* because it told us less about Kennedy than we could find in White.¹⁶

The book versus movie argument is one side of the cinema-verite squeeze, the other being cinema-verite versus fiction films. The temptation to compare the films with both written journalism and filmed fiction reveals something of the mixed qualities of cinema-verite, but the arguments usually find cinema-verite on the lesser side of either comparison. In the particular case of *Primary*, I think the only problem is one of intention. Whether or not Drew, Leacock, and the rest wanted 'to show what really goes on in an election', that they failed to do so by no means implies that the film is a failure. Just as *Primary* is not *Making of the President*, the converse is equally true. There is no reason one has to assume that the two are in competition, that their respective creators must achieve the same ends. Part of *Primary's* appeal is that it seems resolutely to avoid the more mundane electoral matters which fill up so much television and newspaper space during those periods. Rather than supplanting White, it supplements him considerably.

It is interesting that detractors had to cite a book in their argument, that there is no film, documentary or fiction, they could name which approaches *Primary's* degree of revelation on the workings of American politics. Surely David Wolper's TV version of *The Making of the President* (scripted by White) is precisely the type of documentary Drew and Leacock resolutely oppose: heavily narrated history lessons. Even here, though, it is possible to see *Primary* as an alternative, equally true and not necessarily contradictory. Unfortunately, *The Best Man* and *Advise and Consent*,

88 the best fictional films on recent American politics, are surely further away from any feeling for reality than even Wolper's film. Both fiction films are hopelessly burdened with contrived melodrama. In both films, for instance, a homosexual accusation is sprung as a key dramatic point. By pretending to give us the inside story, which they expect people to believe is sordid and perverse, they lose considerable claim to veracity. Despite common source material, the final product of each of the three genres (direct cinema, journalism, and fiction films) is hardly comparable.

Primary was shown on the four Time Inc television stations, the same limited circulation which their next film, *On the Pole* (1960) was to receive. ABC became interested in their work after these first two programmes demonstrated that this type of film had commercial possibilities, and Drew signed a contract along with Time Inc to co-produce four one-hour documentaries for the ABC *Close-up* series. John Daly, who was then in charge of ABC News, objected to the ABC-Drew arrangement, claiming that his authority as head of news and public affairs shows was being violated. Daly subsequently resigned.¹⁷ This kind of in-fighting is indicative of the network politics that later kept most of the Drew-Leacock films from reaching a large audience, and no doubt from this very beginning causing a dilution of quality for fear of running into network disfavour.

David

David (1961) is about an ex-addict living at Synanon House, a place where a group of similar individuals voluntarily join together to help each other stay away from drugs. We are with David for a week (or so we are told), waiting to see if the young trumpet player will be able to stay off heroin. His story gets sidetracked a couple of times by episodes about two other addicts, both of who eventually leave, presumably to return to drugs. This works neatly, suggesting only too obviously the possibilities for David.

There is the inevitable go at a crisis moment. At a time when the stories of all three addicts are coming to a head, the narrator says that 'emotions are building up to an explosive Synanon session'. The session turns out to be little more than a dull encounter group situation lasting for at least a fourth of the film. The experience is less than enlightening and not a satisfactory resolution to the manufactured crisis. The film ends as it begins, with shots of David swimming in the sea. This week (says the narrator) has been a victory for David.

David is not as bad as I may have made it sound. It is redeemed by an intangible degree of concern for David's fate, a feeling of cameraman's love for his subject. Where in *On the Pole* our interest in Eddie as a person is closely tied to the excitement of the race, in *David* we care more for the truth of his struggle than for dramatic titillation. There are a couple of beautiful scenes with David and

his wife and child, the tenderest moments in any of the Living Camera films. We also find a skillful use of David's music, a fittingly melancholic sound that is used for mood in several well-edited sequences that seek to do nothing more than convey the feeling of the place at that time. (Admittedly, some find this contrived. Henry Breitrose, for one, objects strenuously: 'It is as if the style screams to the audience "Isn't this poetic and moving!" It may very well have been, but the qualities of poesy and emotion are destroyed by its obviousness'.¹⁸ The moments when plot is not advanced an iota are invariably the best in *David*.)

The better qualities of *David* are due, I think, to D. A. Pennebaker, and assigning credit here is only done because *David* is indicative of a particular sensibility that is evident elsewhere in Pennebaker's films. In its own way, Pennebaker's work is equally as distinctive as Leacock's, and while his range of interests is more limited (on the basis of his work to date that I have seen), his style is no less identifiable. Louis Marcorelles even goes so far as to say that only Pennebaker, among all those who worked on these films, was able to assert a personal style, and that he accomplished this in *David* and *Jane*.¹⁹ I would disagree about the uniqueness of Pennebaker's accomplishment (because Leacock asserts a personal style as well), but anyone familiar with his later work would know who is responsible for *David*.

The Hemingway-like ending of *David* brings up a touchy point, the degree to which a film-maker should have control over the material he shoots. Marcorelles, in the same article, raves about the final moments:

The last scene attains an extraordinary plastic beauty; it gives us the nostalgia of a more refined classical cinema, of a Frank Borzage enriched by nuances of direct: David's success is in the balance, he is going bathing in the California waves, entering almost timidly into the water. And Pennebaker's camera follows him from a distance, trembling imperceptibly, as if at the mercy of the waves which carry him.²⁰

When I asked Pennebaker about the ending, he dismissed it completely, saying that it was forced on him despite his objections. He thinks it falsely suggests that David is better off at the end of the film than he was at the start and that this simply wasn't so.²¹ Whether or not Pennebaker is correct in his interpretation, this is a good place to assert what should have been assumed from the first: the edited film should not contradict the film-maker's view of the event. Marcorelles may be right about the beauty of the last scene in *David*, but if the person who shot it doesn't think it's a true representation of the event, then it shouldn't be there. This may sound like idealistic quibbling, but I hope the pragmatic considerations behind it will become more apparent when we consider further examples. Part of this, of course, is the possible

Nehru

Nehru (1962) is almost an open admission of failure by the Drew team, a shift from the avowed intention to make a film about the Indian Prime Minister to an auto-critique of the problems encountered in following him and the difficulty they had in maintaining the relationship they wished to establish. The result is something of a disaster, but one that lays bare important unstated assumptions behind the Living Camera philosophy.

The original idea for Leacock and Gregory Shuker to film Nehru for fifteen days prior to an election, providing the dual opportunity to observe Nehru during a crisis period and get a first-hand look at India as he travelled. The idea is a familiar one for the Drew group. Besides *Primary, Kenya, Africa* tried the same approach. So, from the outset, they expected a familiar kind of conflict. To put it mildly, things didn't happen quite as they had envisioned. Leacock describes the problem: '... we had thought that because there was an election coming up there would be some kind of tension ... but the election of Nehru was such a foregone conclusion that you barely noticed it'.²² Lacking that conflict (we never even find out if he had any election opponents), another was found in the editing room – between Nehru and the film-makers.

The film begins with Leacock and Shuker introducing themselves on camera, and then explaining what their relationship was to be with Nehru and the manner in which they work. (This was shot afterwards in New York.) Leacock says that the arrangement would be that 'He, for his part, would ignore our presence' while the film-makers would promise not to interfere with his activities in any way. Shuker (who was to record sound) tells of the need for getting the microphone in close and demonstrates the method used to obtain synchronised sound, tapping the mike.

And so the action begins. Leacock and Shuker provide the narration. The first scene shows Nehru at some sort of reception. Shuker says: 'Nehru greets his guests but ignores our presence. The deal is on'. During a meal, Shuker reports what is said, explaining that he couldn't get close enough with his microphone. The scene continues with what almost looks like a parody of the pitfalls of direct cinema: a dog starts barking at Shuker and conversation at the table stops as they watch his loud canine encounter. Normally rejected gaffs like this one are a major component of the film.

One almost envisions editing room conferences about which of several scenes is most embarrassing, thus meriting inclusion in the finished film. Two more examples will suffice. In one scene, Leacock narrates: 'Nehru notices something. Now I pan over to see what

it is [the camera pans over to Shuker, then the shot of Shuker is frozen for several seconds]. . . . A slip on his part of the bargain', for not ignoring the film-makers. A scene that rivals the dog barking scene in terms of self-parody involves a struggle by Leacock and Shuker to hop on a jeep in the midst of a surging crowd. Leacock manages all right, but Shuker tells of first having to throw the tape recorder on and then getting his hand stuck under a bar on the jeep. Soon after, Leacock shows Shuker covered with flowers that have been tossed in the direction of the Prime Minister.

Things go on like this for most of the film. Shuker taps on the mike, Nehru notices the camera or makes an explicit reference to it, and so on. Then, a final crisis occurred (or was created). Says Leacock in the narration, 'We were moved with an overwhelming desire to talk to the man'. Shuker continues by saying that to interview Nehru would jeopardise the chance for further filming, but they will take that chance. In a strange way, the relationship of subject to film-maker is treated as a mystical spell that can be broken with a single word. An interview is set up, one that fully justifies the recalcitrance of those direct cinema film-makers who refuse to resort to interviews. The questions are ludicrously uninformed, the answers unrevealing, as in this tepid exchange:

Shuker: How do you feel about the kind of life you have to live?

Nehru: Generally it's a satisfying life.

The film ends with a final reminder of the film-making process, Shuker again tapping the mike.

Clearly, some drastic measures were taken in putting the film together. Drew made the decision to edit the film in this manner because, he says, they had 'run the risk of starting to tell a story about a person during a period that was not a key or important time in his life' and that it wasn't apparent from the footage that this was indeed such a crucial period for Nehru. He feels that the interaction between the film-makers and the subject was evident, and says:

At some point I crossed the Rubicon and decided that was more relevant and interesting, and a better frame of reference, at least for an American audience, than simply to see what Nehru was doing along with conventional narration.²³

Or, as Leacock briefly sums it up, the form is 'a gimmick Drew dreamed up to save a boring film.'²⁴

There has been a strong divergence of opinion as to the source of error, whether it was in the choice of subject or the manner in which it was edited. One French critic who has written astutely about American cinema-verite feels that the fault lies in the incompatibility of film-maker and subject, that Nehru lacks the 'champion' personality of a John Kennedy or an Eddie Sachs.

92 Nehru's Oriental sensibility, this argument goes, is not sufficiently akin to the kind of American character that is on the go all the time and able to tolerate more easily the presence of the camera. The error, then, was in believing that this method is 'absolutely and universally valid'.²⁵ (This view is perhaps supported by Leacock's observation in an interview that Nehru 'was just doing what he usually does day after day'. He excused the film as a result of inexperience, claiming that they were not yet at a point where they could make films in other than 'high pressure situations'.²⁶

Others saw the fault elsewhere. Colin Young calls the structure a 'hold over from conservative classical drama' that is totally unnecessary. His conclusion has far-reaching consequences: 'It ought to be enough to spend fifteen days with Nehru, so long as the film-maker is telling us something we did not know before, and probably could not know by any other means.'²⁷ This is perhaps the single most promising sentence in all cinema-verite criticism, one of the few statements which encourage cinema-verite film-makers to become more adventurous, rather than suggesting that their work is too 'emotional' (as Bluem and Shayon say) or their goals impossible to achieve.

It may not be clear that the two points of view represented by Bringuier and Young are here mutually exclusive. The former accepts the effectiveness of the Drew films where the subject is suited to the crisis structure, and claims that the successful films will be those that recognise the limitations in subject possibilities. In other words, structure dominates subject matter. The latter, on the other hand, implies that any subject which interests the film-maker is suitable material, and that direct cinema should reject traditional theatrical forms and search for new ways to structure the films. In this view, what was wrong with *Nehru* was not the Prime Minister himself (as Bringuier asserts), but in Drew's and Leacock's lack of faith in the possible interest of their subject for its own sake without a story to prop him up.

There is a bridge between the two poles, and that is where I will put myself, because I don't think either side quite explains the problem of *Nehru*. Each argument makes a valid general point, but neither is entirely applicable to this specific case. The fault, I feel, lies in the film-maker's interest in Nehru solely as a public figure, a man of action. They want him to conform to their own image of what he should be like. To this extent Bringuier is correct: Nehru is not John Kennedy. But the fault lies in their thinking he could be, not in any inherent unsuitability of the subject. Young is partially correct in this instance – it should have been possible to make a film about Nehru. This is not, however, a structural problem. It is a matter of the subject having sufficient confidence in the film-makers' acceptance of his normal activities. Leacock and Shuker were not ready to do that; they were expecting action. In a way then, *Nehru* is a very honest film, reflecting their

awareness of their inability to win the confidence of the subject. But admitting your mistake is not equivalent to transcending it, and *Nehru* remains an unsatisfactory work, albeit a very curious one.

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We might do well to conclude discussion of this film by pointing out that economics required every film experiment, as all of these are, to look like a success. One does not send a film crew to India and then come back and abandon the project in the editing stage. Unlike a scripted film, which can be written and then abandoned if it looks unsatisfactory or unrealisable, a direct cinema film involves far bigger risks. With *Nehru*, they gambled and lost. But a failure costs as much money to make as a success, and has to fill the same amount of television time.

Jane

Perhaps the most common criticism of direct cinema is that a person constantly subjected to a camera can never truly forget its presence, that he is never 'natural'. As I have already suggested the situation is a good deal more complex, for it turns out that the tension between film-maker and subject depends upon several variables. The point I wish to stress now is that whatever the nature of this tension, to a large extent it is visible on the screen. In the Drew films there is scarcely a single moment when one is not able to hazard a reasonable guess as to how much 'acting' is going on, and in most cases guessing isn't necessary at all.

A degree of awareness of this problem is already apparent in these films. The very fact of their preference for people accustomed to the limelight (politicians, actors, musicians) suggests that they felt this sort of person would be less affected by the presence of a camera. (A more obvious consideration in their selection is, of course, audience interest in famous personalities.) These are the people who are 'on' all the time, whether playing to one person, a roomful, a large audience, or a camera. And because we see them as public figures, we can be aware of this facet of their personalities, their inclination to perform.

This notion leads to *Jane* (1962), for it follows the question of acting in front of a direct cinema camera in a natural direction. The film shows Jane Fonda in rehearsals for a Broadway play, 'The Fun Couple', through to its second night closing. The degree to which Jane is acting is always in the open; in fact, it is a primary interest in the film. Continually present is the obvious contrast between her on-stage acting style and her off-stage manner. That we would not, then, consider the possibility of an on-camera and off-camera difference is naive – the first comparison invites the second. And as soon as we recognise this, it ceases to be a problem. The role playing and deception become, instead, a key concern. When you know there is distortion in a measurement, you are able to compensate for it. (This is an analogy Leacock also likes

94 to make, no doubt a reflection of his early physics training.) The game of who is aware of what (the viewer aware that the subject is aware of the camera) sounds complicated, but in practice it is, I feel, readily comprehensible.

We mentioned before Louis Marcorelles' feeling about a discernible style being present in the two Pennebaker films, *David and Jane*. While he doesn't go on to explain what he means by this, I think we are now on the track of it. The two films both push their subjects' defences to the limit. As can also be seen in *Don't Look Back*, Pennebaker's film on Bob Dylan, he is particularly adept at filming people when they are doing very little, in direct opposition to the cinema-verite maxim about trying to film people when they are involved in other things so that they will forget the camera. Pennebaker's camera invites its subject to pretend they are ignoring its presence, for through that pretence we will learn something about them.

Jane Fonda was interviewed a year after the film was made, and there is a good indication she came to understand this. In part, this is what she said:

*Jane was a nightmare because I was filmed rehearsing and acting, and there were moments when I didn't know when I was acting and when I wasn't. There was the camera all the time, from start to finish; it was very strange. It was only when I saw the film, a good time after, that I understood what I hadn't realised during the experience. The film was truer than the experience itself. . . . My terms with the play were false and ambiguous. Thus on the whole, in a sense, this film was a false thing about a false thing, and it is that which was true. . . . I learned many things as an actress from this film. I saw that the best way to make something happen is to do nothing (my italics).*²³

This excerpt shows Miss Fonda's keen insight, after the fact, of the revelatory power of Pennebaker's camera, her realisation of the possible paradoxes in his way of filming that can still lead to truth. (There have also been reports that Miss Fonda was greatly upset when she saw the film for the first time.²⁹ Even if exaggerated, they lead to an interesting speculation on the power of direct cinema. Actresses should be accustomed to seeing themselves on the screen, but of course Miss Fonda had never really seen herself in this way.)

The film certainly does catch her during a hectic period. The play itself looks like an obvious disaster from the first moment we see a part of it. The fascination throughout is in the effect that the impending catastrophe is having on the company, and their blind faith that they may somehow have a hit on their hands. Jane is romantically involved with the play's director, and the strain on their relationship brought about by the play's difficulties

is convincingly captured. The travelling from city to city for tryouts, the endless rehearsing, the backstage tension before opening night: the theatrical clichés are subverted by the complete mess they are trying to perfect. Nominally another crisis-oriented structure, *Jane* has a full hour of the same feeling that the last moments of *On the Pole* had, the observation of someone caught with their defences down because they aren't able to maintain publicly their own self-image. The best moments are surely played for the camera: Jane in her dressing room mugging in front of a mirror, Jane and her director in a taxi cab (she whispers something to him when she doesn't want the camera to hear), and an excellent scene of Jane reading the reviews of her performance.

Louis Marcorelles raises a question that one hears frequently: couldn't this be done better in a fiction film? Isn't, in this case, Lumet's *Stage Struck* (1958) a more persuasive portrait of a young actress than *Jane*?³⁰ This is an interesting addition to the earlier question of book versus movie concerning *The Making of the President 1960* and *Primary*. On the one hand, cinema-verite is faulted for not being close enough to written journalism, on the other for possibly being less effective than drama. Marcorelles is only partially convinced of *Jane*'s superiority: 'At the level of immediate perception, the physical sensation that something is really happening as it is being filmed, Jane holds all the cards'.³¹ Left unsaid, however, is the implication that beyond the 'level of immediate perception', fiction films are superior.

Once again, it ought to be pointed out that direct cinema does not seek to displace the fiction film any more than it would written journalism. But if the defenders of the older forms feel threatened, perhaps it is for good cause. A better comparison with *Jane* than *Stage Struck* is the scene in *Citizen Kane* of Susan Alexander Kane reading her bad reviews. (Lumet's film, a laboured and sentimental remake of *Morning Glory*, also has a review reading scene, but it, like the rest of the film, is too clumsily executed for worthwhile comparison. Hopefully, Marcorelles' mention of the film was no more than pedagogically motivated.) Welles' scene is a skillfully edited interplay between Susan's yelling and Kane's quiet reactions. Its effectiveness is heightened by lighting and camera position to enforce the relationship between the two people, especially in the last moments when Kane literally overshadows Susan. In *Jane*, the corresponding scene is phenomenal in its understated simplicity. Stripped of fictional invention, Jane's thinly masked restraint, her near-tears reading, is even more theatrically powerful. Not scripted or rehearsed, there is no need for the scene to justify itself dramatically, no use for camerawork to emphasise what is already abundantly evident. Though the camera may have affected her, it is still a version of reality of substantially greater credibility (as well as dramatic impact) than Welles' admittedly masterful scene. Superior to fiction film or not, a scene like this at least

An annoying little 'sub-plot' is added to *Jane*, and it sticks out so obviously and artificially that it is worth mentioning. Near the beginning there is a brief shot of *New York Times* Drama Critic Walter Kerr, who isn't heard from again until close to the end of the film, just prior to the play's opening. We then follow his journey from the *Times* office to the play and then back again. The old technique of parallel editing is then trotted out, and from this point to the scene of Jane reading Kerr's review, the story lurches back and forth between Kerr and Jane (him typing in his office, her partying at Sardi's, etc). This comes as an unnecessary intrusion at a time when Jane's story alone has more than enough momentum of its own. The Kerr material is a hedged bet, reflecting uncertainty as to whether the rest of the story could stand alone. *Jane*, like *On the Pole*, is able to sustain interest without shallow editing devices.

A scene of Jane alone in her dressing room is quite unlike any other in the Drew films, very close to a sort of actor's improvisation in front of the camera. Jane, sitting before a mirror, is not content to remain still, and instead launches into a series of grimaces, looks, bits of impersonations, and the like. According to Pennebaker, there was a dispute between him and Drew while editing this scene as to whether the sound of the camera should be filtered out as much as possible. Pennebaker felt that the noise should remain, making it clear that the audience was not seeing Jane alone in her dressing room, but Jane alone in her dressing room with a camera observing her.³² Drew apparently won out, as the sound of the camera is scarcely evident in this scene. Pennebaker was right, of course, but I think his intent still remains clear. No pretence is being made of 'invisible recording', a notion brought up more frequently by cinema-verite's detractors than its practitioners or defenders.

Jane, then, is not typical of the Drew films, for the nature of its probing stems from a different notion of the possibilities for direct cinema. It is the product of a camera style that does not wish to minimise its presence, instead of serving almost as an instigator of the action. I think it is safe to assume that such fine distinctions were lost on the majority of *Jane's* audience, but the difference between, say, *Blackie* and *Jane* is unmistakable in retrospect. They are characteristic of two wholly separate approaches to this kind of filming, beginning with different assumptions about their subjects that result in entirely separate relations between the cameraman and what he is filming. The former (like *Blackie*) is closer to journalism, a kind of surface reporting that is often all that is necessary for a very likable, effective film when the subject is cooperative; the latter tracks the elusive, openly questioning both the subject and the recording method.

The Chair (1962) is a hybrid of the two main tendencies in the Drew films, between the multiple camera coverage approach to an event of short duration and the method of closely following a single person for a long period of time, ultimately capturing particularly intimate moments. It is clear from the final film that an enormous amount of material was shot (reports vary between 60,000-70,000 feet of 16mm film, roughly 30-35 hours when projected, compared to 18,000 feet for *Primary*) for there are a number of extraordinarily personal moments that I would think had to be culled from many hours of filming. The blending of these two approaches might, on first thought, suggest an ideal synthesis. To my mind, however, it indicates the incompatibility of mixed viewpoints. This may seem inconsequential, but it is an issue that was to have an important part in what eventually led to the end of the Drew-Leacock association, a fundamental breach between their conceptions of the possibilities for direct cinema.

Once more, at the risk of sounding repetitious, the film revolves around a highly tensed situation.³³ In this case it is literally a life-and-death matter: Will Paul Crump, a black man sentenced to death nine years previous but now substantially rehabilitated (according to many who know him including the prison warden), be executed, or will his lawyers be able to have his sentence commuted to life imprisonment? This is surely powerful material, with strong emotional content, opportunity for discussion of basic social issues, and all tied together by a certain conclusion (and possibly a very upsetting one). What, then, goes wrong? I think it is not so much that what is there is so bad, but that it conforms too well to dramatic expectations. Despite the power of some individual scenes (among the best the Drew group ever shot), the raw material seems seriously diminished.

The story begins five days before the scheduled date of execution, and the principals are introduced quickly. Don Moore, a Chicago lawyer, along with Louis Nizer, brought in from New York to assist, are to prepare a last ditch effort for a hearing that will decide whether to recommend a commutation sentence to the Governor. The warden, who we learn later will pull the switch if execution is to be carried out (by Crump's request because the warden has become his friend), tests the electric chair. (This is another of the famous tracking shots, down one hall, into an elevator, down another hall, and into the room with the chair.) The prosecuting attorney, his case all prepared, practices his golf swing at a driving range. And of course there is Crump himself, visiting with the editor of a novel he has been preparing. (Another fine scene. Crump is asked to do some rewriting. The look on his face as he asks 'Do you want me to do that now' is incredible.)

Topping even these fine scenes, the first part of the film has one of Leacock's great pieces of work. It is a very long take in

98 Moore's office. He receives a phone call telling him that the Church will issue a strong statement of support for clemency. It is apparently something Moore has been trying to get for some time. After hanging up, he begins to cry but then holds back, pauses, puts out a cigarette, and then really cries. The camera moves away, as if in deference to the power of the emotion, and then the shot ends.

I would think that a shot like this could only come about after, first, a strong degree of trust between film-makers and subject, and, second, as the climax to a long period of shooting. Leacock (with Drew taking sound in this case) seems able to film intimate situations without provoking them, minimising the importance of the camera's presence in a self-effacing manner that is communicated to an audience through the restrained but purposeful selection of camera movements. It is a style as personal as Pennebaker's, but more in keeping with the flow of events. Leacock's skill is evident in the more open actions of his subjects, Pennebaker's through the tension between camera and subject. (This is a rough generalisation rather than a strict differentiation. It is more correct in characterising the best moments of each than as a description of their total work.)

The parole hearing defence is handled by Nizer, who earlier delivers a to-the-camera explanation of the rehabilitation issue. Nizer is a skillful speaker, and he comes off well. The original prosecutor of the Crump case, now a judge, takes the stand and questions Crump's attitude toward contrition. Nizer reads a letter written by Crump to the Governor, and during the reading of the letter the camera pans over to Crump's mother in the audience (identified shortly before by the narrator), down to her hands, and then back to Nizer. Substantial portions of the prosecution and defence summations end the hearing.

On the day of the decision, the suspense is played up for all it's worth. Sample narration: 'At the County Jail, Paul Crump waits twenty feet from the chair'. The warden conducts practice drills with the chair while waiting for word. There is a shot of the Governor reading through some papers, others of Moore waiting in his office. Near the warden's office, cameramen set up for a possible news conference. Moore receives a call that commutation is to be recommended. Elated, he talks about going to the races and sends his secretary to get a racing form. At a press conference, the warden announces that the sentence has been commuted to 199 years. Crump appears before the press: 'What have you got to say Paul?' 'I thank God'. 'A little louder'. Over the noise of clicking cameras, someone asks Paul to smile, but he is visibly shaken by the experience and not able to respond to the clamour of the scene. The film ends with shots of Moore at the races, and then of Crump being transferred to the prison where he will begin his life sentence.

The Chair certainly has no shortage of fine moments. The initial

problem, though, is that it exploits traditional courtroom and death row clichés to the hilt: the young lawyer serving for no pay because his cause is just, the star defence attorney, the spectre of death, the warden with a job to do. It may well be true that real life is full of high drama, but *The Chair* deals in too many clichés when the film's evidence indicates a tension of an even higher order. An event may be too dramatic, as well as not dramatic enough, to adapt to conventional forms.

There have been several explanations posited as to what goes wrong, each close to the heart of the problem. Louis Marcorelles speaks of the shift in interest from Crump to Moore (partly necessitated by the shooting conditions), resulting in the sacrifice of 'simpler human truths' for suspense-through-editing.³⁴ It would be more correct to say, I think, that given the shift from the Crump to Moore, it was not a sufficiently committed shift. Had it been more completely Moore's story (or Crump's, as Marcorelles would have preferred), simpler human truths might still have been evident. The difficulty arises out of the balancing act between separate stories. In another article, Marcorelles admits that the suspense may be strong and well-intentioned, but that nevertheless it is arbitrarily introduced and receiving toys with a man's life.³⁵ Robert Vas implies that *The Chair* is either edited too much or not enough, saying that it 'is no longer the raw material nor is it the final, shaped product'. His metaphor is crude, but the point is well-taken: 'Somewhere between the two extremes of raw material and final product lies the banana-skin of which this technically so progressive way of looking slips artistically'.³⁶

Godard, in his previously mentioned blast on American cinemaverite, is particularly vituperative in his use of a familiar argument:

After having seen *The Chair*, we know less about the electric chair than in a mediocre film starring Susan Hayward that follows melodramatic techniques [referring to Robert Wise's *I Want to Live* (1959), which, though it is a negligible error, was about the gas chamber] (Godard).³⁷

This is part of the same editing argument, I think, since *The Chair* apes the fictional courtroom and prison stereotypes in a format all too recognisable from film and television dramas. But Godard is wrong, for the problem with *The Chair* is not that we 'know less' about the people and institutions here than in comparable fiction films, but that we know them equally poorly. His argument suggests the superiority of fiction films in dealing with social issues, where actually it is the dependence on fictional conventions and imitation of fictional editing techniques that is *The Chair's* crippling error.

When a film is finished, the question of the particular source of a general problem, whether it results from shooting or editing or any other point of control, seems too open to unfounded specula-

100 tion. In the case of *The Chair*, one could believe that the suspense orientation and stereotyped characters are an outcome of the choice of subject and/or the resulting footage. This argument would continue by saying that the editing possibilities were then rather limited, that they were dictated by the material then at their disposal. This is an inviting interpretation, but in this case at least, it is a false one. I think we can pinpoint specifically the evidence against this, in support of my feeling that reality was too powerful, and in a way they were not accustomed to dealing with. (I do not, however, wish to suggest that the film is a fiasco. In fact, it is out of respect for the passion still evident in the film that this examination is worthwhile.)

The prime responsibility for *The Chair* belongs to Gregory Shuker, who had the original idea for it and maintained his supervisory role through to the editing. Pennebaker and Shuker (on sound) covered Crump and also Nizer. Leacock and Drew (sound) were on Moore, and together they all covered the parole board hearing.³⁸ This split means that neither group knows what the other is getting. Especially in a situation of brief duration (here it was a couple of days), structure comes after the fact. The relationship between the parts, the points of transition between them, the overall thrust of the narrative: these are editing, not shooting, decisions. *The Chair* is not a unique case in this respect. Nearly all the Drew films were shot with at least two camera crews, often many more. What is unique is the incompatibility of the separately shot material and the preference for maintaining independent narratives and not supplying much of any one.

The Chair should have been either the story of one person or else eight hours long. Pennebaker's two good scenes of Crump (with his editor, at the press conference) and Leacock's two with Moore (two phone scenes, one when the Church supports them and the other when commutation is recommended) are highlights for which one craves details. It is a cheat to show displays of emotion without sufficiently preparing for them. Deciding to juxtapose such moments (not even considering problems of different shooting styles) means simplification of ideas; one conflict after another is a device of melodrama.

In the midst of this falseness, anything is possible. It comes as no surprise in this context to learn that the great shot following the warden on his inspection of the electric chair was actually done a month later.³⁹ When direct cinema comes from bits and pieces, this opportunity for deliberate falsity can be an overpowering temptation. And to make matters worse, part of the shot is used a second time. When a structure leaves room for such manipulation, we must categorically reject its use. Without credibility at the base of our response to a cinema-verite film its prime source of strength is cut off. The unquestioned power of individual scenes in *The Chair* makes the falseness of the overall structure that much

more apparent. It's simply too exciting to be true.

Even more tantalising are the suggestions that some of the events in the film might not have been as stereotyped as they appear. Leacock says in an interview:

... many things were omitted because they did not fit the conception required of the film: 'Will he or won't he?' Will Paul Crump be saved from execution? For instance, the young lawyer was terribly pissed off when Louis Nizer came in on the case. And said so. 'Who's this s.o.b. coming out from New York?' And he was terribly concerned with the race-track all the way through it. And sometimes you wondered, 'How the hell is this guy ever going to get out?' He was never going to get the bloody brief written.⁴⁰

Even discounting possible exaggerations here (although Pennebaker also expressed similar feelings to me), it still indicates an inflexibility in the editing that is an anathema in direct cinema. Editing can conform to a film-maker's personal vision, but that vision becomes highly suspect when it coincides so closely with traditional drama. Further, when someone edits material they didn't shoot, the chance for falsity is clearly greater. At this stage, obligation to reality is more likely to take back seat to efficacy as entertainment.

A good place to end our discussion of *The Chair* is to bring up an accusation that has been levelled many times since the Drew-Leacock films. It is surprising, in fact, that it had not come up earlier and more often. The issue is privacy. A BBC-TV executive in discussing American direct cinema said that *The Chair* 'illustrates more clearly than any other film the danger of this kind of filming - that it may degenerate into a sort of voyeurism, a hunt for any situation where people are stripping themselves emotionally'.⁴¹ Except in rare cases (so far, at least), this seems like a manufactured problem. Provided that those being filmed give their consent, where is the immorality? The most private moment in *The Chair*, I feel, is the look on Crump's face while he is being callously treated by reporters at the press conference. It is hardly an incident of voyeurism. The issue of privacy become a matter of viewers being sensitive to situations they would prefer not to watch or acknowledge.

to be continued

Notes

1. Roy Huss and Norman Silverstein, *The Film Experience* (New York; Delta, 1968), p 114.
2. See, for example: Jean-Louis Comolli, 'Le detour par le direct', *Cahiers du Cinéma*, No 209 (February 1969), pp 48-53, and No 211 (April 1969), pp 40-45.
3. See, for example: Louis Marcorelles, 'Le cinéma direct nord américain', *Image et Son*, No 183 (April 1965), p 47.

4. Andrew Sarris, 'The Independent Cinema', *Motive*, XVII (November 1966), p 30.
5. Ian Cameron and Mark Shivas, 'Interview with Richard Leacock', *Movie*, No 8 (April 1963), p 16.
6. Author's interview with Robert Drew.
7. Louis Marcorelles and Andre S. Labarthe, 'Entretien avec Robert Drew et Richard Leacock', *Cahiers du Cinéma*, XXIV (February 1963), pp 20-21.
8. Sarah Jennings, 'An Interview with Terence Macartney-Filgate', *Terence Macartney-Filgate: The Candid Eye*, ed Charlotte Gobeil, Canadian Filmography Series, No 4 (Ottawa, 1966), p 6.
9. Ulrich Gregor, 'Leacock Oder Das Kino Der Physiker', *Film* (Munich) IV (January 1966), p 16; interview with Richard Leacock.
10. George Bluestone, 'The Intimate Documentary', *Television Quarterly*, IV (Spring 1965), p 52.
11. Marcorelles and Labarthe, *op cit*, p 21.
12. Author's interview with Richard Leacock.
13. Author's interview with Albert Maysles.
14. Author's interview with Richard Leacock.
15. Claude Julien, 'Un homme dans la foule', *Artsept*, No 2 (April/June 1963), p 46.
16. Jean-Luc Godard, 'Richard Leacock' in 'Dictionnaire de 121 Metteurs en Scene', *Cahiers du Cinéma*, XXV (December 1963-January 1964), p 40.

On the other side of the Atlantic *Cinema Verité* is translated as - 'candid camera'. And candid Leacock certainly is in more than one sense, pursuing truth with such fervour that he doesn't even ask himself which side of the Pyrenees he has the lens, this side or over there? Nor therefore, what truth is in question. By not separating cause from effect, mixing the exception with the rule, Leacock's crew fail to take into account (and what is cinema but the rendering of accounts) that the eye composing the shot in the viewer is both more and less than the recording instrument it uses. Yes, more and less (more in Welles, less in Hawkes) but never just that recording instrument, which remains a recorder, or becomes a pan and brush, as the case may be. Deprived of judgement, Leacock's camera, despite its honesty, loses two of the camera's basic qualities - intelligence and sensibility. A sharp image is no use if the intentions are fluffy. What's more Leacock's lack of subjectivity in the end becomes lack of objectivity. We know less about the layer after seeing *The Chair* than we do from seeing *Dial M for Murder*, and less about the electric chair than we do from any film following the lines of melodrama and starring Susan Hayward.

In the same way we know less about the Democrat Kennedy after seeing *Primary* than we do from reading Ted White's book, All this is easily explained by the fact that the *mise en scene* in Leacock's group is on a par with a Gordon Douglas - not even a Hathaway or a Stuart Heisler. With the additional fault that they aren't even aware that what they're engaged in is *mis en scene*, and that there is no such thing as pure reportage. Hence their childish mania for filming in close up events which demand a long shot, accompanying people instead of following them, and sticking so close to actuality they kill it. To sum up, all the faults that a cameraman on Walt Disney's documentary series wouldn't commit, since Leacock also seems not to know how to use a magic

'Marker' to annotate his 'Rouches' (rushes). Briefly, it takes more than honesty to fight in the *avant garde*, especially when you don't know that while reality surpasses fiction the latter gives as good as it gets.—J-L G.

17. 'Television's School of Storm and Stress', *Broadcasting*, LX (March 6, 1961), p 83.
18. Henry Breitrose, 'On the Search for the Real Nitty-Gritty: Problems and Possibilities in *Cinema-Verite*', *Film Quarterly*, XVII (Summer 1964), p 38.
19. Louis Marcorelles, 'Le cinéma direct nord américain', *Image et Son*, No 183 (April 1965), p 52.
20. *Ibid.*
21. Author's interview with D. A. Pennebaker.
22. Cameron and Shivas, *op cit*, p 17.
23. Author's interview with Robert Drew.
24. Author's interview with Richard Leacock.
25. Jean-Claude Bringuier, 'Libres propos sur le cinéma-vérité', *Cahiers du Cinéma*, XXV (July 1963), pp 16-17.
26. Cameron and Shivas, *op cit*, p 18.
27. Colin Young, 'Cinema of Common Sense', *Film Quarterly*, XVII (Summer 1964), p 28.
28. Jane Fonda, 'Jane (an interview)', *Cahiers du Cinéma*, XXV (December 1963 - January 1964), p 187.
29. Hal Seldes, 'D. A. Pennebaker: The Truth at 24 Frames per Second' *Avant-Garde* No 7 (March 1969), p 48.
30. Louis Marcorelles, 'Nothing But the Truth', *Sight and Sound*, XXXII (Summer 1963), p 116.
31. *Ibid.*
32. Author's interview with D. A. Pennebaker.
33. A well organised summary in words and pictures is available. It is recommended for an idea of the film which my brief summary will not express. 'The Chair', *Show* (April 1964), pp 51-55.
34. Louis Marcorelles, 'Nothing But the Truth', *Sight and Sound*, XXXII (Summer 1963), p 115.
35. Louis Marcorelles, 'La foire aux verities', *Cahiers du Cinema*, XXIV (May 1963), p 30.
36. Robert Vas, 'Meditation at 24 F.P.S. 'Sight and Sound XXV (Summer 1966), p 121.
37. Jean-Luc Godard, 'Richard Leacock' in 'Dictionnaire de 121 Metteurs en Scene', *Cahiers du Cinema*, XXV (December 1963-January 1964), p 140.
38. Ian Cameron and Mark Shivas, 'Interview with Richard Leacock', *Movie*, No 8 (April 1963), pp 17-18.
39. James Blue, 'One Man's Truth: An Interview with Richard Leacock', *Film Comment*, III (Spring 1963), p 19.
40. Blue, *loc cit*.
41. Antony Jay, 'Actuality', *The Journal of the Society of Film and Television Arts*, No 15 (Spring 1964), p 6.

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FILMOGRAPHY

In the absence of a completely accurate filmographical information, below is a list of the films involving two or more of the following: 'Living Camera' series/Robert Drew Associates Production/Time Inc. Sponsorship/Leacock, Pennebaker, and other film-makers.

- 1960 *Primary*
On the Pole
Yanki No!
Balloon
- 1961 *Petey and Johnny*
The Children were Watching
David
Adventures on the New Frontier
Football
Blackie
- 1962 *The Chair*
Kenya, South Africa

- Susan Starr*
Jane
 1963 *Eddie (Eddie Sachs at Indianapolis)*
Nehru (also known as *Portrait of Nehru, Nehru Story*)
Aga Khan
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Nicholas Garnham

There is a very vocal body of opinion which claims that in the work of a small handful of documentary producers, television – and especially British television – has enjoyed its finest creative moments.

It may well be that the television of our own time will not be remembered for its new dramatists, its rediscovery of satire or its presentation of controversy, but for the programme of a small group of men who have used the TV documentary as a means of expressing their own vision of our age.

That judgment was made in 1965 by Norman Swallow in his standard work *Factual Television*. It was made by a man who has been in the thick of TV documentaries, both BBC and ITV, since the beginning. It is a judgment that is widely shared and which I believe to be true in important respects. But the inferences I would draw from that judgment are rather different, I suspect, from Norman Swallow's. He lays his stress on the creative achievement. This is essentially a valuation of TV documentary that stems from that tradition which saw 'the documentary' as the art cinema of Britain and equated a particular artistic mode with general artistic achievement. I would agree that the TV documentary is generally characteristic of TV and therefore worth examining not as individual creative achievements but as representative of some general truths about television. I would lay the stress on the creative failure rather than on creative achievement.

It is interesting that Norman Swallow continues the quoted passage by citing the names of the following directors, Denis Mitchell, Ken Russell, John Schlesinger, Philip Donellan, Don Haworth, John Ormond, Richard Marquand, John Boorman, Peter Watkins. Just to read that list six years later is to confront the creative failure. It is a failure that I know that not only Norman Swallow, but also some of the listed directors recognise but seem unable to explain. The days of high hope are over. Most of those directors have left TV for the feature film industry and those who remain have scarcely consolidated their achievement, let alone advanced. Why is this and does it matter?

I think the reasons are aesthetic and that it matters because these documentary directors are indeed representative. TV is deeply committed over a wide range of programming to a narrow documentary aesthetic mode (from *Z Cars* to the Stork margarine commercials). This is why the work of the best documentary directors can be seen as TV's quintessential achievement. But at the same time the limits of that achievement demonstrate something central about television as it now is. The particular documentary

110 mode within which they have been working has shown itself to be a creative trap. But the widespread adoption of that mode is no accident. It satisfies the central ideological needs of the present TV system and that is why those working within that mode could not break out without leaving television. (I am not saying that they broke out even then, because this documentary mode and the ideology it underpins are also central to our whole cultural tradition and thus to the feature film industry).

Political economy has indeed analysed, however incompletely, value and its magnitude, and has discovered what lies beneath these forms. But it has never once asked the question why this content takes these forms, why labour is represented by the value of its product and labour time by the magnitude of that value. These formulae, which bear stamped upon them in unmistakable letters, that they belong to a social structure in which the process of production dominates man, instead of being controlled by him, appear to the bourgeois intellect as much a self-evident natural necessity as productive labour itself. (Marx)

In bourgeois parliamentary democracies TV systems are, in general, committed to 'objectivity' and 'impartiality'. Like the legal system, they support the ruling class by appearing to be above and beyond politics. Argument and discussion about the possibility or otherwise of this 'impartiality' has concentrated exclusively on content, so that those who believe such impartiality to be impossible have advocated change in the system, on the basis of the Dutch or some other model, to widen access and create a diversity of sources. But the aesthetics of television have been overlooked. And yet it is I believe in aesthetics that television's greatest ideological weapon now lies, a weapon that is used unchallenged to support the status quo.

To be unaware of the ideological significance of aesthetic modes is characteristic of our philistine traditions in visual culture. But recent work in the United States has established beyond equivocation the ideological significance of film grammar. These investigations were the extension of the insights of Sapir, the anthropologist and linguist, into the field of documentary. Sapir maintained that the grammar of a language incorporated a world view. Whether this is true or not, and it is not a view that modern linguistics would uphold, doesn't for the moment matter. But it was the starting point for experiments carried out at the Annenberg School of Communications. In these experiments clearly differentiated social groups were each asked to make films and what emerged was that each group, American Indians, white middle-class suburb kids, black ghetto kids used an identifiably different film language, a language that was quite clear to other members of the group but not at all clear to outsiders. In short what it established was that film technique is not neutral.

What then is the significance of those characteristic techniques used by TV documentary makers? The impartial broadcasting institutions claim to 'reflect' the world. It is therefore essential for their ideology that they adopt that aesthetic mode which claims to do the same ie, naturalism. And so it is within the narrow bounds of naturalism that documentary in particular and TV in general has developed. This mode sees the act of communication as essentially passive and its tools, for instance the camera, as essentially neutral. It stresses the recording function of film or TV rather than its manipulative and illusion-creating function. There is a real objective world out there and a subject/observer/voyeur who records that real world with the minimum intervention, who opens a window on the world. As Denis Mitchell puts it

The producer of this kind of film tries to show people as they truly are, expressing themselves in their own words, and doing the things they normally do. They are real people living in a real world.

This aesthetic rules out progress. If things are as they are, it is impossible to even contemplate showing them as they might be. So within this aesthetic you can only go on adding slice of life to slice of life, all equal, all essentially the same. So the appearance of progress within this aesthetic has been largely technical, the search for the Holy Grail of a totally transparent technique, with first the development of light-weight tape recorders, then of 16mm cameras, crystal sync and faster and faster film stocks. The current development of Super 8 and ½ inch video equipment are all steps in the same direction, smaller and better ways of reflecting 'reality'. That such an unmediated reflection of reality might be a repressive instrument is hardly ever faced. The assumption continues that the more transparent the technique, the more neutral and unbiased the film becomes. *Man Alive* both in its title and in its technique illustrates this fallacy perfectly week after week.

Complete naturalism is the aim, and whenever it can only be achieved at the expense of clarity in picture and sound, then it is always the technical quality that must give way

or again

Nor is there any doubt that *Showman* gains immeasurably in conviction by being so clearly unrehearsed. Even its technical weaknesses, the woolly sound and now and then the picture that is poorly exposed or soft focus, seem to add to its essential reality. (Norman Swallow)

But, of course, such naturalism is not neutral. It supports the status quo by allowing people to believe that things are as they are. It plays down the element of thought. It stresses what is, as opposed to what might be. It helps to create what Marcuse has

Naming the 'things that are absent' is breaking the spell of the things that are; moreover, it is the ingress on of a different order of things into the established one – 'le commencement d'un monde'.

For the expression of this other order, which is transcendence within the one world, the poetic language depends on the transcendent elements in ordinary language. However, the total mobilisation of all media for the defense of the established reality has coordinated the means of expression to the point where communication of transcending contents becomes technically impossible.

Of course those actually making documentaries have always known how artificial this naturalist mode is. They know that a documentary film is an artifact; that whether at the level of choice of subject or choice of shot the world presented on the screen is an abstraction, an interaction between a subject/film-maker and an object/outside world. But because of the ideological needs of the system they have never been able to carry the logic of that truth very far. Because the tape recorder was developed before the light weight 16mm camera, there was a brief period when, especially in the work of Denis Mitchell, a dialectic between sound track and picture began and the lessons learnt on the sound track were applied to the picture in a redevelopment of montage. The possibilities of that development can be seen in Mitchell's *Chicago*, the high point of TV documentary. But these developments were killed by the ideological limits of the system. Aesthetic experiment was considered irresponsible and ivory-tower, not the proper province of common-sense Englishmen who knew better than to suggest that what is is not what is. So the developments on tape became the no-commentary documentary, just another version of the window on the world and any possibility of development in that direction was finally blocked by the development of ciné-verité techniques which once more married picture and sound track and discouraged montage editing styles.

When something seems 'the most obvious thing in the world' it means that any attempt to understand the world has been given up. (Brecht)

But whatever small dissatisfactions with the dominant mode there might be within the profession the one thing that was clear was that it was very unprofessional to show any signs of this doubt to your audience. They must not be given any inkling as to the manipulation they were undergoing. Peter Watkins used certain alienation devices, such as a TV reporter talking to camera, in *Culloden*. But history is a safer area. It is easier to be committed about the past and anyway it was a costume picture. But

when *The War Game* touched a sensitive contemporary political nerve, both the limits and contradictions of the prevailing ideology were exposed. Watkins used captions as an alienation device, but he did something more subversive. By using the naturalist, documentary mode to portray an unreal event he exposed the artificiality of the mode. *The War Game* was banned both for being too realistic and for being untrue.

But the essential strength of film as a medium is that it is both real and untrue at the same time. Indeed it can only be real by being untrue or rather it can only be true by being unreal. As Godard put it:

Beauty and truth have two poles: documentary and fiction. You can start with either one. My starting point is documentary to which I try to give the truth of fiction. That's why I've always worked with professional actors.

But when Roy Battersby followed this path with *Five Women* he was told that it could not be transmitted because to mix drama and documentary was not 'keeping faith with the viewers'. In other words the audience know they are being manipulated by drama, but they mustn't know that they are also being manipulated by documentary.

This does not mean, however, that I am advocating the use of naturalist, documentary conventions for drama. On the contrary I think the work of Ken Loach and Tony Garnett in which these conventions have been brilliantly mimicked, illustrate the dangers of doing this. Even when working in drama they seem to be caught in the same trap as the documentary directors once they adopt their extremely limited aesthetic. It is the power of this aesthetic that must be broken. Garnett and Loach are making films whose content is the need for political change but they are made in a style that cannot be other than reactionary. And the style wins every time so that the political message is limited to an expression of essentially sentimental solidarity and aspiration rather than the conscious analysis that is required.

In the Spring 1965 SFTA Journal Garnett in defending his own practise criticises TV drama for its derivative nature.

Most of it is locked in a particular period of theatrical history (3-sided sets placed around the periphery of a studio) which reminds us of the theatre in the 1890's. In those sets are enacted domestic naturalistic dramas – bourgeois individualism of the sub-Paddy Chayevsky school.

But what is strange and shows how deeply the prevailing ideology has been absorbed at a formal level, is that Garnett can see no parallel between the use of the naturalistic documentary mode in *Cathy Come Home* and the theatre of the 1890's. Cathy was worse than bourgeois individualism. It was close to a Lassie

114 movie. Indeed it could have been called *Lassie Come Home* and the same tears would still have flowed. The technique is as old as D. W. Griffith. The innocent young mother and her children beset by vicious officials. Garnett and Loach now seem to accept that *Cathy* had an actively pernicious effect on the political situation with which it was dealing ie that by appealing to the emotions it enabled people to feel that somehow they had done something rather than actually forcing them to confront the reality of the political situation. It became the problem of one poor family and not the problem of the ownership of land. It was in fact a classic example of bourgeois individualism.

The bourgeois theatre emphasised the timelessness of its objects. Its representation of people is bound by the alleged 'eternally human'. Its story is arranged in such a way as to create 'universal' situations that allow Man with a capital M to express himself: man of every period and every colour. All its incidents are just one enormous cue, and the cue is followed by the 'eternal' response: the inevitable, usual, natural, purely human response. (Brecht.)

My contention is that the use of the naturalist documentary mode inevitably forces the work of Loach and Garnett into this category whatever their intentions. It is a problem of aesthetics. Just as Brecht had to develop an epic theatre in order to describe the present-day world which, as he said, 'can only be described to present day people if it is described as capable of transformation', so I think we have to develop epic forms of television and this means freeing ourselves from what has come to be called the documentary style, but is in fact only one possible documentary style, the naturalistic one. We must return to the ideas of those early documentary makers and theorists in revolutionary Russia who saw documentary as a break with the naturalist conventions of the novel and the theatre, as an abstract process, a process of thought, of mastery of everyday reality not slavery to it.

Use of the film camera as a cinema eye, more perfect than the human eye for fathoming the chaos of those visual phenomena which evoke spatial dimension

but even more important,

combined action of the liberated and perfected camera, and of the strategic brain of man directing, observing and taking stock of things (Vertov)

In other words it is essential to bring back active intelligence into film making, to proclaim the artificiality of film making. It is essential to attack the concept of a film as an object of contemplation an attitude that is merely a mirror image of the concept of the film maker as passive observer. We must see the film rather as a

catalyst, as a tool for social change. *The documentary must immerse itself in real life in order to act as an educational experience, first for those involved in the filming and then for those who subsequently view it. Its total artificiality must be constantly stressed. It must be seen as part of a process and not as a commodity.* 115

But to do all this will challenge the ideology on which the present system is based and the system will resist. Maybe the system will win, in which case there is no way forward within the system. But the conflict must take place at an aesthetic level. It is a dangerous illusion to think that any sort of revolutionary statement can be made in an essentially reactionary style, as dangerous as that other illusion dear to some film makers, that you can perfect your craft by making commercials.

Society cannot share a common communication system so long as it is split into warring classes. Thus for art to be 'unpolitical' means only to ally itself with the 'ruling' group. (Brecht.)

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Ashley Pringle

At the present time, discussion of the future use of television has revolved around the potential of a fourth channel, the most publicised detailed suggestion being that of ITV2, a plan submitted to the government by Brian Young, director-general of the ITA, on December 8, 1971. The appearance of the plan, with its emphasis on more of the same programmes, with a stricter 'overlordship' by ITA over the existing companies, has rightly been criticised from many quarters for its wilfully inadequate vision. Television can only, the plan implies, be run as a benevolent oligarchy, through which screened material is heavily filtered. The starting point of the argument implied appears to be that all change must stem from pre-existing organisations, and new demands must be modified to fit these organisations; wider access is thus seen as something which can only be made possible by virtue of the liberalism of the executive body.

Prior to the assembly of the particular type of organisation represented by the two channels there existed some very firm notion of the range of possibilities for the medium, this being based on pre-existing models, as well as on the social composition of the executive body – hence the importance of the Reiths and the Grades in casting a near-hegemonic shadow over the products of their organisations. These possibilities emerge in the ITA plan as little more than a slight change of emphasis (more current affairs programmes, more arts and science programmes) with an extension of the Press as a model for programming (suggestion for the equivalent of a newspaper correspondence column); the organisation-maintaining idea of a tight programme schedule is placed a priori . . . the hierarchy of the television company with production staff, planners and an enterprises department all geared to the production of more weekly half-hours of manufactured social concern flows directly from this and, to complete the circle, their control over programmes is reaffirmed.

The usual argument used to defend the present system of BBC and ITV control is either a technical or an economic one . . . equipment is expensive, programme production is expensive, public money must be spent to benefit a wide audience, or, advertising revenue is only attracted by the lure of a large audience. Alternatively, the need for technical expertise with the apparatus denies the possibility of wider access. For similar reasons, varied to suit the particular case, the companies are unhelpful to researchers. This position inverts the actual determinants of programme production; *instead of programme possibilities (in the widest possible sense) creating a temporary organisational framework, the nature*

Having seen the current organisation of television as being parallel to the organisation of industry in our society, it becomes essential to examine in what ways the products of the medium reflect its organisational discreteness. Essentially, television (and this probably applies to radio too) is more heavily 'mediated' than any other medium; the alteration of received material into a form considered to be 'televisual' changes the nature of the content or 'message'; this filtering process draws its rationale from pre-existing norms of the organisation, and in preceiving themselves as the liaison between the material and the viewers, it is correct to speak of the producers as mediators, particularly since their conception of public taste is the principal determinant of screened material at present. Why is this so? Most obviously, television is limited to two organisations, with no independent body capable of gaining access to the means of production. It is partly as a consequence and partly as a determinant of this that television becomes a regular occupation for production staff, thus necessitating the regular series as the staple form (ie a structure which keeps production teams together over a long period). The precision of programme timings and the time-slot principle itself, where certain programme types are seen to be applicable to certain viewing periods are indices of both administrative rigidity and the domestic/entertainment conception of the viewing audience held by producers and programme planners. Perhaps television is most unique in its financing; a crude model of economic determinism might in fact suggest that the BBC dependence on the TV licence subsidy produced inevitably the Reithian ideology of the 'national interest', whereas the ITV's dependence on attracting advertising revenue was the equally inevitable determinant of the 'entertainment' character of that company's programming pressed most characteristically by Lew Grade. In fact, the nature of the companies is more complex than this, a number of other factors intervening, in particular the confusion of purpose and sense of audience expressed by those further down the production hierarchy. This problem is complicated by the fact that television has no direct box-office popularity feedback. Popularity is nevertheless encouraged, partly to justify financial outlay, and partly with the satisfaction a company has with a successfully advertised product. The parallel between market research and TV audience research, while tempting to make, is not a clear-cut one, since television has no further quantitative validation of its programme policies than these relatively unreliable figures. Some producers lay great stress on viewing figures, using them as a justification (in some cases the only serious justification) for the survival of the programme they are engaged upon. With other series, especially those classed as 'minority', viewing figures are ignored. The confusion of role and disagreement over basic philosophy of the communications

118 industry evident amongst producers is implicit in official pronouncements from the BBC charter onwards, so that issues of Entertainment v Education and the primacy of the medium's 'Broadcasting' function, are still central, and become explicit in the presentation of particular programmes, where the format and the message are commonly incompatible. The central accusation which is to be levelled at the two-channel system is that their form of competition becomes not a means of presenting genuine alternatives, but a consensually narrower version of the Press, since priority is given to the equivalent of 'sales', and self-justification emerges in smug little statements about the favourable trend of viewing figures towards one or other of the channels.

In saying all this, it is fair to mention the variety of television programmes which this system has, in spite of its limitations, permitted to be screened; the many perceptive documentaries, series with original scripts which have provided opportunities for a variety of styles of social commentary (cf the Galton and Simpson scripts, Johnny Speight's work for Arthur Haynes and *Till Death* and on the other hand *Monty Python*). Also, it is important to point to television's role in giving a wider audience to some of the best, and least available of modern drama and cinema, as well as enabling a wide range of films to be shown which might otherwise be difficult to obtain. The point to be made, however, is that these do filter through by virtue of the 'benevolent oligarchy' structure of BBC and ITV, and it must be re-emphasised that programmes are set in the context of 'an evening's viewing' which inevitably affects the reception of particular programmes. This realisation gave rise to the right-wing critique of television for 'trivialisation', and groups of commentators right across the ideological board have correctly perceived this arrangement as crucial (see Philip Abrams' discussion in Thomson ed. *Discrimination and Popular Culture*). In its influence over possible action, television is the least Brechtian in its effects of any medium, a result of the confusion of commitment of its widely-drawn production staff.

These preliminaries set the context for the discussion of what television is now like, and what it may be developed into. It is surely essential, in view of the ethical confusion depicted above, to begin from some sustained political polemic, since mass communications are central to awareness of current events, how social groups perceive themselves and the relations with other groups. The precise operation of the medium in performing this function and its recent historical role in promoting social stereotypes and limiting frameworks of political activity requires detailed analysis; in this way 'the hidden sources of alienation and mystification' may be revealed. This task is logically prior to the formulation of a programme of future proposals, which may simply duplicate the failings of the existing system, or covertly fulfil for them the role of apologist, owing to inadequate awareness of the 'organisational

determinism' of the current models, and a curtailing of the development of the potential scope of the medium (as manifested in the ITV2 proposal).

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This essay is concerned with developing techniques of analysis for television drama series. Why this specialisation? Denis McQuail has observed

In the past . . . the study of mass communications has suffered a good deal from the dilemma, partly a methodological one, posed by the need to investigate interdependence between units in a larger social system and the need to reach findings about the independent cases and sub-units respectively. . . . Thus at different times, the content of mass communications is regarded as given and unalterable, economic and political forces are left out of account, or the tastes, interests and capacities of the audience are regarded as fixed independently of the structure of communications holding at the time. (*Towards a Sociology of Mass Communications* p92, Collier-Macmillan 1969).¹

This trap is most easily fallen into in the discussion of television with reference to the reporting of news, where the issues tend to be limited to truth of reports, objectivity and 'unwitting bias', with minimal reference to 'the structure of communications holding at the time'. In the case of drama series, these vital relations virtually force their way to the surface of the analysis. What is under scrutiny is the presentation of images of others, pictures of (perhaps) unfamiliar sections of society; this partly informative function of the series explains the emphasis on naturalistic styles as the most praised virtue of the drama output. This organisational structure, which it is essential to discern at the outset of any analysis, imposes, at the level of individual series, a relatively rigid structure, both externally (series can be seen to have been fitted into a pre-existing genre) and internally (the familiar set of plot structures within any one series). The drama series fills in what the experience of the viewer only half-glimpses or suspects in a rather vague way. The images they provide of their subject-matter consist of composites of apparently perceived commonplace realities, fantasy (including stereotypes and imaginary events) and necessity (by the very nature of the actors taking part and the demands of individual plots). I suggest that these elements fill in or explain away otherwise unresolved contradictions in contemporary society, by locating themselves at points of tension and consummating them in the most consensually acceptable way. The role is similar, but at a much more complex and varied level, to that fulfilled by fiction in women's magazines (as discussed by Raymond Williams in *Communications* p82-3). Action in such series cannot simply be accepted at the naturalistic level on which we are offered it therefore; it must be interpreted *symbolically*, the series themselves being seen as contemporary *myths*. In both cases, the meanings and implica-

120 tions of the words are those employed, in common with much 'cultural' analysis, by Henry Nash Smith in *Virgin Land*

The terms 'myth' and 'symbol' . . . designate larger or smaller units of the same thing, namely an intellectual construction that fuses concept and emotion into an image. The myths and symbols with which I deal have the further characteristic of being collective representations rather than the work of a single mind. I do not mean to raise the question whether such products of the imagination accurately reflect empirical fact. They exist on a different plane. But as I have tried to show, they sometimes exert a decided influence on practical affairs.²

In this sense, the Reithian 'dialogue the nation is conducting with itself' takes on a newer, unintended significance.

Each episode of a drama series deals with a certain topic, range of content and new characters, but must also contain less discreet material whose function is simply to place it in the context of the series. This is created and stems from the perception of their role and the role of others by actors, writers and production staff. In this sense, the series, if not the avowed subject matter of a particular episode, is a 'collective representation'. In sidestepping McQuail's 'methodological dilemma', it is suggested that the underlying assumptions, actual values and stereotypes of a society are revealed through analysis of the kind to be embraced. With reference to an analysis of a single episode of a given series, there are two levels on which to proceed. Most obviously, there is the action peculiar to that episode. Interpreted through this, and apparently incidental to it, is the overall action of the series, its 'meaning', based on a pre-established code which creates certain expectations from the structure, and 'knowledge' of and empathy with the regular characters. Nash Smith's book is an outstanding example of the kind of range of conclusion analysis using the conceptual tools of 'myth' and 'symbol' can generate, but it is to research more directly engaged with the various media that we must turn for any paradigm of this two-level approach, so it is now necessary to review some of this literature, searching for those aspects which need to be modified, both for reasons of ideological incompatibility and practical problems to do with the peculiarities of the medium concerned.

*From Caligari to Hitler*³ charts the ways in which cinema films of Kracauer's pre-world War II Germany respond to and represent the changing social and political climate of the nation. His theoretical starting point is clearly stated:

In recording the visible world – whether current reality or an imaginary universe – films . . . provide clues to hidden mental processes. . . . And permeating both the stories and the visuals, the 'unseen dynamics of human relations' are more or less

characteristic of the inner life of the nation from which the films emerge. (p7).

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German history, by virtue of the peculiar historical moment of the analysis, is seen in a broadly deterministic sense, leading to Hitler Nazism:

... behind the overt history of economic shifts, social exigencies and political machinations runs a secret history involving the inner dispositions of the German people. The disclosure of these dispositions through the medium of the German screen may help in the understanding of Hitler's ascent and ascendancy. (p11)

Perhaps the strongest virtue of the Kracauer approach is his awareness of the continuous dialectic between matter and consciousness: ie between shaping historical events and 'mental attitudes'; valuably, he concerns himself most directly with the latter; avoiding overdeterminism by this emphasis;

Notwithstanding their derivative character, psychological tendencies often assume independent life, and instead of automatically changing with ever-changing circumstances, become themselves essential springs of historical evolution. (p9).

The detailed treatment of the Caligari film itself, based on a sense of the implicit choice in the film between tyranny and chaos, is a mainly symbolic analysis, the emphasis being on the interplay between 'narrative and pictorial elements' (p72). His treatment of the latter, which employs what I will later call 'iconographic analysis', is particularly persuasive. The difficulty I find with his method stems from the too sharp distinction he draws between 'realism' and the disliked artificiality of the 'studio constructivism' in the making of the film; the remark

Since reality is essentially incalculable and therefore demands to be observed rather than commanded, realism on the screen and total organisation exclude each other. (p76).

seems rather naive now, and seems to suggest an inadequately argued aesthetic; in fact aesthetic criteria do apply in this work, but only remotely, and they tend to be assumed, or else conjured up by reference to the reductionist notion of realism displayed here, in which Kracauer does not make sufficient allowances for the mediating factor of the film's creators; virtue seems to be construed as a piece of everlasting *cinéma vérité*. His method, as a corollary of this curious position, stresses historical progression of the film industry in Germany, rather than attempting a genuine generic treatment of the materials (the genres tend to be grouped together in discussion as a further link in the historical chain, related to particular movements). The treatment involves some useful cross-referencing; 'tendencies', 'x recalls y' and 'y foreshadows x',

122 but fantasy seems to be regarded throughout as intrinsically bad.

Kracauer's study culminates in an analysis of the Nazi propaganda film, which aims to be directly manipulative of the emotions for a particular end. In the appendix to his book, Kracauer gives examples of structural analysis of these films, employing the distinction between 'Content' and 'Functions' of particular shots (shots of moving troops represent the idea of implacable German advance). Since the makers' aims are the creation of a certain psychological disposition in the viewer, it is obviously correct to use these tendentious terms; as Kracauer points out, in this way particular shots 'assume a symbolic meaning' (p330), correctly, since concept and emotion are fused into this image. As far as a paradigm for the analysis of fictional material in television series is concerned, while Kracauer's basic method of analysis has much value for the researcher, it is clear that the concepts of content and function are localised in reference to propaganda material, which is directly manipulative, as distinct from the myths borne by television series, which the inevitably more complex artefacts into which distortions of the truth enter with less direct and wilful a function. Less tendentious substitutes for the terms 'content' and 'functions' which yet preserve the two-level approach mentioned above, remain to be found.

A study concerned with a similar notion to the psychological 'life' of a nation, but lacking both the clear commitment and 'realist' aesthetic of Kracauer is Wolfenstein and Leites' *Movies: a Psychological Study* (Free Press, 1950).⁴ The study is concerned with comparisons between American, British and French films of the '30s and '40s. Recurrent patterns underlying different films represent the common 'daydreams' of many viewers;

Where a group of people share a common culture, they are likely to have several daydreams in common . . . The common daydreams of a culture are in part the sources, in part the products of popular myths, stories, plays and films. Where these productions gain the sympathetic response of a wide audience, it is likely the producers have tapped in themselves the reservoir of common daydreams. The corresponding day-dreams, imperfectly formed and only partly conscious, are evoked in the audience and given more definite shape. (P13).

This is an excellent discussion of the nature of the production-consumption dialectic in miniature, and says much about the method of the study, in which the positivism of much of this research in the USA is avoided. The simplicity of the categories of character types used is well suited to continual cross-referring of plots with changing fashions of national morality. An instance is the preference of Americans for the 'good-bad girl', who combines the sexual and affection impulses, and resolves the need stressed by the culture to have 'fun', while remaining loyal to the con-

ventional 'goodness morality'. The American 'good-bad girl' appears to be bad enough to be sexually attractive, but turns out to be good. In contrast, French films involve the 'etherialising or ennobling' of the bad girl, who may even be 'the prostitute ennobled by love' (p41). Alongside the cross-cultural dimensions of the study, there is a historical dimension. The 'rescuer of women', hero of an older melodramatic tradition, has 'tended to degenerate into a comic figure' and appear as 'a case of arrested development'. This is in contrast to British films, where such a character still 'has a better chance of being accepted' (pp44-5). The study has taken great pains to point out, in spite of this invaluable cross-referring, its localisation to the films covered by the research, and the culture from which they emerged, so perhaps it is unreasonable to expect any of the actual conceptual tools to be transferable to another medium, other than commending the extreme rigour and precise social reference which make the study so unique. Its reason for claiming our attention lies in these elements of its method, but its limitations in this respect are those it sets itself, the material covered perhaps being the source of the emphasis on the populist aesthetic, which takes little account of the mediating influences of the conditions of production as a factor in predetermining content and attitudes;

... both the positive sanctions of the box-office and the negative ones of the code are probably indicative of more or less widely diffused feelings and attitudes in American culture, (p14)

This, plus the fact that the two-level approach is external to the material itself, ie the manifest content of the film is seen in relation to social developments outside it, means that the method cannot be wholly adopted for the analysis of television series, but it forms essential referential material for theoretical purposes.

A much more positive approach, but one which is directly engaged with series study is W. Lloyd Warner and William E. Henry's *The Radio Day-time serial: A Symbolic Analysis* (from *A Reader in Public Opinion and Communications* Ed. Berelson and Janowitz).⁵ The emphasis, on the 'positive influence' of the series in question, ie the extent to which they 'assist the women who listen to adjust to the external realities of American society' (p425), indicates the behaviouristically simplistic and socially functionalist background which we, with our commitment to a critical and politically polemic stance wish to avoid. Nevertheless, although no distinction is made between the content peculiar to one programme and the impression created by the series as a whole, there is another form of two-level approach which performs a similar function in their analysis. This refers to the notion that content is symbolic, a factor touched on earlier. Warner and Henry see that this is so at two levels; the public and the private;

124 The individuals composing the audience have, as members of society, a common body of understanding through which they interpret what they see and hear in terms of the customary symbolic behaviour making up the common life of America. But each individual in the audience has a whole body of emotions and unconscious feelings and ideas which the serial must also satisfy. These emotionally charged private symbols, combined with those customarily used by all members of the group, are always present in every radio audience. (p424).

Stress can thus be laid on the socially conditioned reception on fictional material, and the 'thematic apperception tests' used by the researchers, while leading to an overemphasis on the psychological functions claimed for the series (a comparison with the social meaning of mediaeval morality plays is perfunctory and incidental to the listing of psychologistic conclusions such as 'the . . . program directly and indirectly condemns neurotic and non-adaptive anxiety' (p435)) at least emphasises the common view of the material held by a large number of viewers. The value of the study lies in its recognition of the symbolic nature of series, and the way in which popular series mesh into the psychological needs of a particular social group. It is necessary to preserve these concepts, while moving on from the narrow psychologism to a methodology capable of taking into account the social, political and cultural dimensions inherent in the production and reception of the material under scrutiny.

At the opposite pole from the Warner and Henry approach is that of literary criticism. Distinctions of method here stem from differences in the view taken of the material in question. While with sociological or psychological surveys and most forms of 'cultural' analysis, aesthetic considerations are usually incidental and the social context of the material is the primary source of interest, with literary criticism, or as it is traditionally practised in Britain, the material is seen through some explicit or implicit aesthetic. Associated with this is some form of ideology; where the aesthetic is hierarchic or meritocratic (ie the erection of a pantheon) then the ideology, which is often simply assumed, is correspondingly elitist. This is one small aspect of the large issue of the connection between literary criticism and ideology, but it concerns this essay since literary models with an unsuitable ideology are likely to prove to have flaws which make them unsuitable for direct adaptation to the analysis of television; these models need to be thoroughly examined for this purpose. An account of the novel which comes very close to the two-level approach to television drama series discussed above is E. M. Forster's *Aspects of the Novel*.⁶ Forster suggests that novels have two simultaneous aspects; the story and the plot;

We have defined a story as a narrative of events arranged in their

time-sequence. A plot is also a narrative of events, the emphasis falling on causality. (p93).

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He goes on to point out that the story is no more than a series of 'and thens', a mere series of events, the 'how' of described events, where as a plot concerns the 'why' of these events;

The . . . reader . . . sees . . . a new fact . . . from two points of view: isolated, and related to the other facts that he has read on previous pages. (p95).

It is immediately apparent that here we have something very close to the distinction between action isolated to one episode, and action as it can be related to prior knowledge of a television series; in other words, separate events are seen in a certain context, just as the images the programme presents are seen in the context of contemporary society. That this is a function practised by everyone, at a more or less conscious level, is not something that Forster would be willing to concede, however. Justifying his meritocratic view with reference to 'intelligence', Forster contrasts his 'intelligent reader', able to read a novel for plot, with the merely curious reader, 'his mouth still sagging open, his eyes still bulging from his head' (p94). Whether anyone actually reads novels in this way is not discussed, this dimension of social reality seeming outside Forster's realm, and the crassness of his cultural narrowness and sociological naivety is indicated by the sweeping claim that

A plot cannot be told to a gaping audience of cave men or to a tyrannical sultan or to their modern descendant the movie-public! (p94)

The ease with which this generalisation is slipped into is only partly explained as the academic ideology of the era (the anti-movie sentiments are close to those expressed by I. A. Richards in *Principles of Literary Criticism*, another work of the mid-1920's); the elitist rationalisations have regrettably remained characteristic of English literary criticism, even if in a more fashionable, pseudo-tolerant, Sunday supplement guise. Furthermore, with filmed material, the product is not the work of one novelist-style creator; it is, as has already been suggested, mediated by many groups and individuals until it is the product of an organisation. These factors, along with the ideological incompatibility of the stance cause us to reject the terms used by Forster, while conceding that this is the nearest parallel to be drawn from the literary field. Where so little attention is paid to the context of the experience that three entirely separate groups of 'consumers' are arbitrarily tossed together, there is no real awareness that the artefact in question has just that social or cultural dimension that most interests us here.

What is unique about the television series? The significant con-

126 tent of any drama series is action concerning several regular characters, who appear through the series, their internal relationships and courses of action and their relationships, individually or as a group, with outsiders, non-regular characters. Viewers are thus enabled to build up a certain familiarity with these regular characters, to 'know' them. Each episode has to some extent the character of a one-off (I was told by Joe Waters, producer of *Dixon of Dock Green*, that he saw his series as having developed into this form; it seems doubtful that it is generally seen in this way by viewers); presumably viewers would describe any one episode as such. The cumulative effect of viewing many episodes of a series is likely to be quite distinct from this, however. The action of a series as a whole places the regular characters as subjects of the action, since they become the only characters it is possible to have 'rounded'. In some series viewers accord praise to the 'naturalism' of the series by taking the characters into their own lives. People who send flowers to commemorate funerals in *Coronation Street* add to this factor a compensatory idealisation of the fantasy world of these series which is not a confusion with documentary reality, nor a true case of 'identification'; the characters are seen as human 'types', but there is little evidence that viewers 'see themselves in them'. Nevertheless, the central characters become the yardstick by which the moral/social standards of non-regulars are measured; it is unlikely that serious disapproval focuses round the main characters, non-regulars are more likely to be seen as the transgressors, and are usually stereotypical; this is a direct result of the series as a form.

It is relevant here to make distinctions between two characteristic groups of central character. The 'type' is perceived as most directly naturalistic; he is a composite of the producer/consumers' experience of various professional groups (which they usually are in this kind of series) and his imagined sense of the relationships operating in their line of work (which may be developed partly from his own work context). Examples are Barlow, Dixon and Steptoe father and son. An indication of this came when, in a recent seminar, a female student described her fantasy of Barlow as a sexually bull-like businessman figure, a bluff boss who has sex with his secretary . . . this very explicit 'typing' is very revealing of the sources from which such fantasy can be drawn. The other group is the very simple 'hero', not usually a recognisable professional figure, often involved in espionage or some form of private detection; Edgar Morin has suggested

The heroes function halfway between gods and mortals; by the same impulse they aspire to the condition of gods and attempt to deliver mortals from their infinite misery. (*The Stars*: Calder 1960: p39).⁷

Examples occur in the less 'naturalistic' series such as *The Saint*,

The Man from Uncle and *Hawaii Five O*, although elements of them can be found in various other types of series. It is the first type of figure that more directly concerns me here.

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Apart from the regular characters, there are certain regular themes in most drama series. These include the conflict between age and youth, the gradual acceptance or rejection of the outsider and the threat to a community from some outside force. These are products of the convenient way in which several series are built round a family or family substitute (police station or hospital); a known, reliable predictable unit, central to the form of society we know and to its preservation, the viewers' growing understanding of the inter-relations in a rounded way being equivalent to the bringing of this into the home, on a perhaps comparative basis. Thus we become aware of a duality in the function of the regular characters; since one is apparent and openly stated, it will be called 'manifest'; since the other is only explicit in analysis, while being of perhaps greater interest, it will be termed 'latent'. The manifest function of the regulars in holding the series together is to appear peripheral to the action, but, as is especially evident when there is only one regular, he actually becomes the agent of the action (qv *The view from Daniel Pike*). The regular becomes the stable centre of events. The non-regular brings contravention of normality into the programme, and the regular restores stability by resolving the conflict. In some cases, the regulars become the only solid characters, while everyone else seems weak or evil; the familiar is good. In this sense, television series have another, less openly apparent set of meanings, the latent ones. This conveys the moral code of each series. The manifest and latent functions exist simultaneously and are in a symbiotic relationship.

While these factors are understood, perhaps semi-consciously, by the viewer, it is important to note that they are experienced at the level of individual shots. While a screenplay depicts certain actions taking place, the action is evaluated and 'coded' by the viewer, structured into what he already knows (like Forster's 'plot'). One important aspect of this is that the plot can be predicted; outsiders are quickly recognised by stereotype and their likely fate is presumed. The continuous confrontation of regulars and non-regulars is inevitably detrimental to the non-regulars because of their flatness. This is a direct product of being a series, which is no more than a product of organisational necessity; in this way the meaning of a series is dominated by the context of its production. There is need for detailed analysis which takes into account the relationship between depicted action and its meaning in the context of viewing, in order to determine how the precise organisational factors discussed earlier percolate through to the meanings of a series. Thus, drama represents social/cultural tensions in stereotypical fashion of the various models offered and provided by social intercourse and other aspects of the media. This

128 is mediated through the unique position of the producers (for details see the first diagram in my article in *Screen* Spring 1971) and a more or less consensual notion of dominant myths emerges in the series. What is demanded of analysis of drama series is a methodology which takes into account both the cultural and organisational factors of production, and that this needs to be very closely related to individual screenplays is evidenced by the immense amount of collective thought and endeavour that goes into even such small aspects of series production as dubbing, precise camera angles, selection of locales, casting and editing. It is hoped that this essay has suggested one possible means of carrying out such detailed analysis.

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Errata

Please note that the following author was omitted from the Index published in *Screen* Vol 13 No 1.

WOOD, ROBIN

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